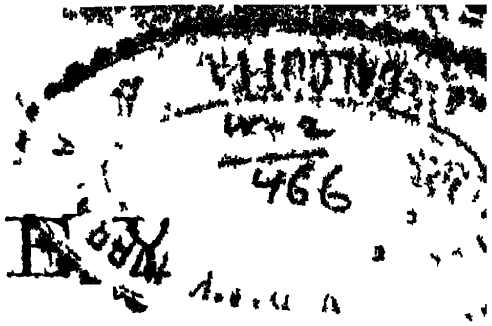

ASHLEY

'ND OTHER STORIES.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

AUTHOR OF

' FAST L "THE CHANNINGS," "JOHNNY LUDLOW," ETC.

Fifteenth Thousand.

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PREFACE

THE following stories are now published in a collected form for the first time. To the reader, therefore, they will be virtually as new matter.

It will be observed that in the first three stories some of the characters are reproduced, though, in one instance, merely a name—that of Chase. Mrs. Henry Wood intended, had she lived, to weave these stories into one romance. How this would have been accomplished by the experienced hand of the author of "East Lynne" we do not doubt. Fresh plot and new characters would have been introduced into the narrative, so connecting one story with another. But the pen was laid aside before the purpose was carried out; and it only remains for the reader to imagine for himself a chain of circumstances by which these now separate threads would have been gathered into a consecutive and complete whole. We have stated the fact because it undoubtedly adds to the interest of the following pages, which are amongst the most graphic and vigorous of the stories written by Mrs. Henry Wood.

One more remark may be made. It may be said by some that the leading incident, the three-fold tragedy, in the story of "Mr. Castonel," is far-fetched and improbable. But truth, we know, is stranger than fiction, and these incidents in the career of the surgeon are founded upon absolute fact.

CONTENTS.

ASHLEY.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	LAURETTA CARNAGIE	1
II.	HIGH TREASON	9
III.	"RYLE THE SECOND"	25
IV.	OLD HANNAH	36
V.	THE BUTTERFLY CHASE	45
VI.	ST. OUEST	53
VII.	"MILADI WILL BE KIND TO HIM?"	64
VIII.	"ASHLEY FOR EVER!"	78
IX.	MAJOR HAYNE'S PERPLEXITY	86
X.	THE DELAYED WILD	95
XI.	BLANCHE	104
XII.	"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND"	109
XIII.	THE MAJOR'S STORY	117
XIV.	CHEATING DOES NOT ALWAYS PROSPER	124

THE ENGAGEMENT OF SUSAN CHASE.

I.	LIEUTENANT CARNAGIE	133
II.	THE TWENTY-NINTH OF MAY	145
II.	A CONSULTATION	159
.	THE PINES	165
.	AT CROSS PURPOSES	175
	MR. LEICESTER	186
VII.	THE END OF AN ILL-STARRED VISIT	200
VIII.	HOME AT LAST	210
IX.	FRANCES MAITLAND'S ANGER	221

THE PREBENDARY'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Lunatic Asylum	233
II.	Mr and Mrs Glynn	241
III	The Storm	248
IV	A Stern Summons	254
V	At Arnbrook Rectory	264
VI	Dr Remar's Decision	271
VII	"May I not hope?"	277
VIII	Nemesis ...	281

MR CASTONEL

I	The Beauties of Ebury	295
II	Mrs Muff's Dream	308
III.	Ellen Leicester ...	323
IV	The Second Mrs Castonel	337
V	The Six Grey Powders	348
VI	A Vain Remonstrance	366
VII	A Wedding Peal	375
VIII	Dame Vaughan's Wonder	397
IX	Mr Tuck's Flight	400
X	Beech Lodge ..	416

CHAPTER VIII.

"ASHLEY FOR EVER!"

"ASHLEY for ever!" "Storm for ever!" Now Scarlet-and-purple! Now Yellow! Who wins? Who loses? Panners floating, streamers flying, drums beating, trumpets blowing! Oh, the confusion, the excitement, the noise and worry of a contested election!

The green balcony in front of the Ashley Arms was crowded with gentlemen. The rosettes of scarlet-and-purple ribbons displayed by some of them were sufficient to denote that they belonged to the Ashley party. Standing bare-headed in its centre, and leaning over the rail, as if about to address the mob, was the candidate in the Ashley interest. He was a tall, pleasant-looking man, somewhere about thirty, with light curling hair and a keen grey eye. It was Arthur Ashley, but his face was thinner than it used to be and his frame less robust. The county returned two members. The one, Colonel Paget, had been its representative many years, and was always sure of his return, and Sir Henry Ashley had now brought his nephew forward as the other. Very little canvassing had taken place: it was thought unnecessary, for a contest was not contemplated: when, a few days before that fixed for the election, a third man was announced. Who was it? No one could tell at first: but to the astonishment of the public and indignation of Sir Harry, it turned out to be Richard Storm, an attorney

in extensive practice at Stopton, a neighbouring town. Then began all the bustle, the ill-feeling of a contested election. Mr. Storm was a popular man in his vocation, of ready speech and vulgar wit, but that took with the multitude: and he was certainly a bold man, for he had appeared in the village of Ashley, to court the Ashley votes, which any one else might have supposed to be as safe as Sir Henry's own. Sir Harry consequently was in a towering passion, and wrote an exaggerated account of the proceedings to his wife, who was then sojourning in London on her return from Paris, fully expecting her to share in his indignation.

A wide yellow banner, "Storm and the People for ever!" was streaming from the beer-shop, opposite the only inn in the place, which was the Ashley Arms, haughtily inaccessible to anything yellow. This beer-shop had a flat roof, ascendable by a ladder and a trap-door. It was not an inconvenient standing spot, and, for want of a better, the yellows made the roof their head-quarters, where Mr. Storm harangued the Ashleyites. At the present moment the roof was deserted, for the yellow band and the banners and the committee, and what recruits they had been able to enlist, were on a parading tour through the village. When they came in front of the Ashley Arms, Mr. Ashley had begun his speech: hisses, groans, and drums instantly struck up, to drown it, but Mr. Storm waved his hand and commanded silence.

"My friends and followers," he said, "let us not forget courtesy. Our rival in the Scarlet-and-purple interest is speaking. Well, let him speak: why should we interrupt him? Keep silence. Who's afraid?"

Arthur Ashley, with a half-smile, inclined his head to Mr. Storm, and continued his address:

"I need not remind you that I am one of yourselves. I have grown up amongst you, and your interests are identical

with mine. If there is one spot on this earth that is dear to me, it is Ashley: if there is one place I would, above all others, see prosperous and happy, it is Ashley: if there is a body of men I would serve at the sacrifice of time, health, and spirits, it is you, my friends, who have been born and bred at Ashley. I need not say that I will support those measures calculated to conduce to your prosperity, or that I will strenuously oppose all such as would tell unfavourably upon you and upon your soil, because it would be impossible for me to do otherwise, for I repeat that I am one of yourselves, and in promoting your honour and welfare, I promote that of my own family. You have ever found Sir Henry Ashley a liberal landlord; you found Sir Arthur such; you——"

At this moment a carriage-and-four came thundering up the hill—for the village of Ashley was not built on level ground—the postboys wearing yellow rosettes as large as their hats. It scared the crowd, whether scarlets or yellows, right and left, and drew sharply up, underneath the balcony.

"Who in the name of wonder is this?" exclaimed Sir Harry Ashley, as he stood at his nephew's elbow. "A well-appointed carriage, gentlemen," he whispered. "Where can our friend of the law have picked up so influential a supporter?"

"Why—egad, Sir Harry! it is your own carriage!" responded Squire Prout. "What the dickens does it mean?"

"My carriage!" loftily uttered the offended baronet. "I think you mistake, squire."

"It bears your arms, at any rate."

Sir Harry Ashley put on his glasses. To his amazement, to his horror, almost to his dread, the carriage did bear his arms. But this compound of feelings was as nothing to the dismay which overpowered him, when Lady Ashley, *his*

wife, put her hand out of the carriage window, and her head after it, and swung about a yellow rosette, larger than any there.

"My dear," he roared out in his sonorous voice, though perhaps, had he betrayed his genuine feelings, he would have addressed her by a less endearing title—"My dear, you are labouring under a confounded misapprehension. Our colours are scarlet and purple. Postboys, throw those yellow drabs to the ground."

"Postboys," retorted Lady Ashley, "keep the bows where they are." Though exceedingly dark, as one born in a warmer clime, she was a very handsome woman, nearly thirty years younger than Sir Harry, and she looked forth on the crowd with a determined countenance and daring lip.

"People," she began—no fear that she, in her haughty exclusiveness, would ever address inferiors as "friends"—"people, I am the wife of your chief, and I forbid you to record your votes for *him*."

She pointed, as she spoke, to Arthur Ashley. Sir Harry stood speechless with consternation.

"You know," she went on, "that Sir Harry had a son born to him, the heir to Ashley. You know that son was drowned. You were told it was an accident; that the child fell into the stream; but I, his mother, tell you it was no accident: that wicked man pushed him in, for he stood between him and Ashley. Will you permit such a man to be your representative?"

A conflicting sound rose from the astonished crowd: murmurs, hisses, and groans. Some intended for the lady speaker, some for Mr. Ashley.

"But his crime has not succeeded—he has been foiled once more," continued Lady Ashley, her dark face assuming an expression of malignant triumph. "He put one heir out of the way, but another, as you have heard, was

born to Sir Harry. Look at him." She seized, as she spoke, an infant of a few months old, perhaps eight or ten, who sat by her side on the knees of his coloured nurse, and held him up to the window, where but little of his face could be seen for the mass of yellow ribbons in his cap border. "Vote for the yellow, people! Yellow for ever!"

"It is as big a crammer as ever was imagined, good friends," screamed out little Surgeon Gay, stuttering in his excitement, as he looked down from a corner of the balcony, "and if it were not out of respect to Sir Harry's wife, I'd tell it you in stronger language. The child did fall in; he fell in of his own accord: and I'll be upon my oath to it, and so will Miller Heath's wife, who saw it done. Her ladyship's gone a little *here*, with the sorrow," tapping his forehead, "when she says that. Mr. Ashley had no more to do with it than you or I had. Ashley for ever! Long live Arthur Ashley!"

But with a wave of the hand, and a smile that expressed confidence in the crowd, Lady Ashley had signed to the postboys, and the carriage had resumed its way to Ashley.

Mr. Ashley, with a pale countenance, expressive more of sorrow than of anger, attempted to resume his speech, but public speaking had been put an end to for that day, and he was hooted down. Some of the mob tore, huzzaing, after Lady Ashley's carriage. As to Sir Harry, all he prayed for was that the balcony would fall in and let him down beyond sight and shame.

Now it was a perfectly well-known fact, known beyond the possibility of doubt, that the death of the young heir to Ashley was purely accidental. The greater portion of those who made the crowd knew it to be so, and that Mr. Ashley, as Surgeon Gay said, had no more to do with it than they had. Nevertheless, will it be believed that they were ready, now the cue had been given them by Lady

Ashley, to cast the crime in his teeth? Richard Storm was liberal with his secret money (or with somebody else's), the beer-shop kept its taps flowing free of charge, day and night, and the usual madness came over the voters.

When Ashley rose the next morning, the walls were covered with placards. "Who boned the child?" "Don't vote for Ashley, the m——r!" "What became of the heir?" Streams are handy!" and with numerous others of a similar tendency. Whilst a wretched daub had been hastily got up, of a drowned child being fished out of a stream, with a gentleman in black, supposed to represent A. A., peeping round a tree with fiendish triumph; and this was borne on a banner about the village. The unjust feeling grew to a pitch of excitement really marvellous, and when the following day came, which was the polling one, Mr. Ashley lost his election.

Sir Henry Ashley (to go back a day or two) descended from the balcony and strode after his wife's carriage, far more excited than the crazy mob. It was reported afterwards that, upon his reaching Ashley, a violent scene of disagreement took place between him and his wife. Certain it was, Sir Henry left within an hour for Stopton, and remained there until after the election, though he and his wife had not met for months. He had last seen her in October, and it was now June. Illness—the remains of a dangerous fever—had obliged him to return to England, leaving his wife and infant in a remote part of France. Shortly after, she had also journeyed on her return as far as Paris, and there she had stopped until now, neglecting her husband's letters of surprise and remonstrance.

As Sir Henry left Lady Ashley's room, banging the door after him and striding along the corridor with angry step, he passed the chamber used as a nursery, and, hearing the infant's voice, turned into it. Little Blanche his daughter,

who had been his sole companion during her mother's absence, was playing with the babe as it sat on the knee of the West Indian nurse. It was one of the lightest children in complexion ever seen. Blanche was fair, with flaxen curls, but the infant was totally dissimilar to her. Its hair and eyebrows were nearly white, its face was quite white, and its eyes were of a light, faint shade of blue. It was a strong, big child, with wide, course features.

The baronet naturally proceeded to take notice of the boy, not having seen it since it was two months old. He drew Blanche away, bent down, and held out his hand playfully.

"Nurse! Nana!" he suddenly broke forth, springing up again more quickly than he had stooped down, "what have you been at with the child? You have changed its eyes and complexion."

The dark woman looked up, terror and perplexity written on her face, had Sir Henry been keen enough to read it. Her lips were strained back and her white teeth stood out.

"Nana done nothing, massa. Piccaninny same little piccaninny that massa leave."

"Same? of course it is the same, you stupid woman! I suppose," added Sir Henry more slowly, "these young babies do change their looks." He stooped again, and would probably have taken the child, but at that moment he heard his wife's door open and her voice calling for her French maid, Elsie, whom she had brought from Paris.

"Changeable as the wind," he muttered to himself as he hastened downstairs and out of the house, on his way, as has been said, to Stopton. "Nothing would do, this spring, but I must discharge Barbarie—who suited for Blanche very well, and did her duty by her—upon the plea that she would have no French women in the house; I was inundated with letters and reproaches until I complied, and now

she has brought home a French minx herself. Changeable as the wind."

Rumour! scandal! prejudice! how insinuating they are! It would seem almost impossible, but it is nevertheless true, that a feeling against Mr. Ashley grew up in the county. Lady Ashley must have had grounds for her accusation, reasoned the gentlemen over their wine; and it was a fact that only the unfortunate child had then stood between Arthur Ashley and the inheritance. Mr. Ashley became aware of this prejudice; some old friends were cool to him at the magistrates' meeting, where he one day accompanied Sir Henry; some refused his invitations, and some passed him over when they sent out their own. A feeling of bitter resentment arose within him. He felt sure that Lady Ashley was still at work, secretly traducing him, and he remembered the threat she had once uttered to him in her jealous rage: "I will wear those words in my heart, Arthur Ashley, until I am revenged." She was carrying out her threat with a vengeance; surely this was a heavy requital for his having slighted her as Miss Carnagie. He took his resolution; he would stop in such an unjust, prejudiced neighbourhood no longer, and away he departed for London with his wife and children. But ill news travels fast, and he found upon his arrival there, that the calumny had preceded him.

CHAPTER IX.

MAJOR HAYNE'S PERPLEXITY.

THE years sped on. Arthur Ashley did not return, and Linden, the small house bordering on Ashley Park, which had been his residence, was kept shut up. One snowy afternoon in the week preceding Christmas, Edward Gay, surgeon and apothecary, as the words on his door-plate indicated, was in his surgery making up pills, when the window was darkened and the doctor saw the brown head of a traveller above the wire blind, peering in through the flakes of snow.

"Open the door, Jos," he said merrily to his son, a lad of fifteen, just entering upon the mysteries of drugs and anatomy. "I think I know that face."

"It is only some old traveller, father, wanting to learn how pills are compounded. Just look at the snow on his hat."

"If you don't do as I bid you, young gentleman, you will have the pills making acquaintance with your head," was the retort, in a make-believe angry tone. "Open the door, sirrah."

"And how goes the world with my friend Ned?" inquired the traveller, entering the surgery, after shaking the snow from his shoes and his hat, and depositing a stout walking-stick in a corner. "Easily?"

"As easily as the cold and a forest of young mouths will let it," was the quaint reply of the surgeon, holding out his

hand and grasping that of Major Hayne. "You are not aged a day, Major. I thought you never meant to pay us a visit again. How long is it since you were here?"

"Five years."

"To be sure. When you brought home Sir Harry after the French fever."

"Ah! a near touch for him, that was," cried the Major. "I have been halfway round the world since then, besides sojourning two years in Canada. Is Sir Harry well?"

"No. I fear he is in a bad way. These pills are for him. Jos, put on your cap and take them up."

"That's one of your young forest, I presume," said the Major, noticing Jos.

"The worst of the lot for taking in potatoes and sundries. His grinders stand at nothing. Be off, sir! Presto! Don't eat the pills as you go."

"What ails Sir Harry?" questioned Major Hayne, as Master Jos disappeared with the box of pills.

"A combination of complaints. Dropsy the most prominent."

The Major's face grew lengthy. "Seriously speaking, Gay, do you mean to say he is a confirmed invalid?"

"He's worse, Major. When I said he was going, I meant it. He is going fast."

"And my lady?" continued the Major, after a concerned pause.

"Don't ask me. Nothing ails her. She is no favourite of mine. I never did like her, but since her behaviour to Arthur Ashley, when she caused him to lose his election, I have despised and detested her. Her eldest child, Carnagie, was drowned, and she told the electioneering mob that he did it. Had I been Sir Harry, I should have put her into a madhouse that very day."

"Was there any mystery attached to the child's death?"

questioned Major Hayne. "Sir Harry once said he would tell me the particulars, but he never did, and I did not choose to ask."

"None whatever: except in Lady Ashley's malignant spirit. To keep Arthur Ashley out of the succession, she would sell her soul to that near friend of hers who wears horns and a tail; and when the accident happened which made Arthur Ashley again the heir-presumptive, the evil of her nature broke out in an accusation against him. It occurred six years ago last July. Carnagie was racing after a butterfly, and raced himself, head foremost, into the stream. Dame Heath saw the accident; and poor Arthur Ashley sat fishing in the same stream, unconscious that there was a young soul, within a stone's throw, drowning for want of assistance. Down came my lady, when the alarm was given, and accused Arthur, in her mad passion, of putting the boy into the water, hardly knowing, I believe, what she said. She was frantic with grief for the loss of the *child*, and with rage for the loss of the *heir*. After that, they went abroad."

"Where another heir was born," rejoined the Major, "just as I met them at St. Ouest. I should as soon have expected to come upon a family from the moon as upon them, in that unfrequented spot, and so far from home. How many children are there now?"

"Only that one, besides the little girl. She has had no more."

"I must make acquaintance with the young gentleman when I go up to-day. I had him in my arms many a time the first few weeks of his life. He bears my name. Sir Harry was at a puzzle for one, and we thought Philip as good as any other. Something else, I think, was tacked on to it."

"Philip Ryle," said the surgeon. "But I did not finish

about Arthur and Lady Ashley. You brought Sir Henry home, you know, five years ago, after that attack of fever at St. Ouest. We heard Lady Ashley was to follow very soon, and you left. But the months went on, and her ladyship never arrived: she was stopping in Paris. Arthur Ashley, with his wife and family, came down to Linden for Easter, for they had all passed that winter in London, he hard at work at his political duties. Soon after he came down, he was seized with inflammation of the lungs. I thought it was all over with him; it was what his father died of: and when he did get better, I told him he must not go back to town and to worry, if he wanted to live. So he stayed at Linden. But in June, when the election came on, he was pretty well, and Sir Henry persuaded him to stand for the county, which he did. A third man came forward, a fellow from Stopton, Dick Storm, no more right to put up for a member than I have, and we all laughed at the notion of his standing against an Ashley. He was as sure of his return, was Arthur Ashley, as I am that I had roast mutton for my dinner this day. When, in the very nick of time, just as we were all assembled in this village street, candidates, county influence, farmers, and mob, my Lady Ashley's carriage appears in the midst of us, like Banquo's ghost——"

"She was at home, then?" interposed Major Hayne.

"No. She had come post-haste from London. It was her first entry into Ashley since she quitted it, nearly two years before. She stopped her carriage, waved Dick Storm's colours in our faces, and forbid the tenants to vote for Arthur Ashley, *because he had drowned the child, who stood between him and the inheritance.*"

"Absurd!" cried Major Hayne, his keen eye flashing. "Nobody but a Bess of Bedlam would venture on such a thing."

"A regular Bess of Bedlam she was, that day, if ever I saw one," returned Mr. Gay. "She persisted in her accusation, turning the anger of the mob against Arthur, and the upshot was, he lost his election and Storm got in. Quite a feeling was raised against Mr. Ashley throughout the neighbourhood, and he left in disgust."

"What did Sir Harry do?"

"Not what he ought. He should have spoken up fearlessly at the time and defended his nephew, instead of taking refuge in silence, which of course gave a colouring to my lady's words. The fact is, Sir Harry is more under petticoat government than he was in his first wife's time, and if she chose to accuse himself of having drowned the child, he dare not gainsay it to her face. I spoke up, and I was a very humble individual compared with some on the balcony, but my pile was raised, as the Yankees say. I should like to have ducked her in Prout's pond."

Major Hayne was a shrewd thinker, fond of tracing out cause and effect. "Lady Ashley must have had some private pique against Arthur!" he suddenly said.

Surgeon Gay nodded a succession of nods.

"Do you know what it is?" asked the Major.

"I only know what's said."

"Well?"

"That when she was visiting here as Miss Carnagie, she was dying of love for Arthur Ashley," whispered the apothecary. "He led her on to it: perhaps he did not know what the passions of these half-caste West Indians are: and then she discovered that he was only amusing himself at her expense, for his affections were given to Anna Rivers, now his wife."

Major Hayne drew a long, deep breath, which ended in a whistle. "Ho ho, Mr. Arthur! then you must expect something. 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.'

The poet spoke of an ordinary fury, and I reckon my lady has the elements of an extraordinary one."

"She just has. Major, not a word of this up yonder. Sir Harry has lived in blissful ignorance of the matter; indeed, few know it."

"Do you take me for a numskull, Ned?" retorted Major Hayne. "I hear and see, as I go through life, and say nothing. If I can put matters to rights in a quiet way, well and good, I do it; but I don't set people together by the ears. Good day; I'm going on to Ashley." He took his stick as he spoke and walked up the street at a sharp pace, humming a scrap of an old Scotch song—

"And when our day shall come, frind John,
We will na meet it sair;
But we'll think on a' the gude we've done,
And could na mak' it mair."

Major Hayne entered Sir Harry's residence through the courtyard, not by the grand entrance; he was fond of announcing himself in the least ostentatious manner. Before he had well closed the gate, however, a sharp salute, in the shape of a snowball, struck him on the cheek. With a few quick strides he seized the delinquent, a lad of five or six years old, who stood staring at what he had done.

"Now, young gentleman," cried the Major, wiping his face, "you and I must settle accounts. What is your name?"

"Master Ashley," answered the boy, stolidly. "I didn't go to do it."

The Major looked at him. An extremely light, *colourless* child, with a wide pug nose and puffy cheeks.

"Gay said there was only one boy," he muttered. "I must have misunderstood him; or this may be a cousin: Arthur's boy, perhaps. Is Sir Harry Ashley your uncle, my boy?"

"Sir Harry Ashley is my papa, sir."

"Well, if you will take me in to him, I won't tell tales: but don't you snowball a stranger again, or you may get punished."

The boy led the Major through the back offices, to the surprise of all the servants they met, upstairs into the library. Sir Harry, wheezing and coughing, was seated in an easy-chair by the large fire; whilst Lady Ashley, in her old, indolent fashion, was stretched back in another, nearly at full length. Nana stood bathing her temples with eau de Cologne, for her ladyship had a headache.

Sir Harry was greatly broken, greatly altered. If anything could arouse him, it was the unexpected sight of his old and dear friend. He struggled to rise, which Lady Ashley did not attempt to do, and Major Hayne drew forward a chair and sat down between them. Presently the boy, who had fetched his sister, came and stood close to the Major.

"This can never be Miss Blanche!" he exclaimed jokingly, as he took a hand of each. "This is a growing-up young lady. Little Blanche used to kiss me; perhaps the young lady will be above it."

Miss Blanche laughed, shook back her flaxen curls, and inclined her rosy cheek towards the Major.

"This one," playfully whirling round the boy, "and I became friends outside among the snow. But I want to see the other boy."

"There is no other," said Sir Harry. "We have only those two children."

Major Hayne looked puzzled. "Gay told me that the boy born at St. Ouest was living. He through whom I learnt nursing."

"That is he," said Sir Harry.

"This is not he," returned the Major in a positive tone,

"What is your name?" he hastily added to the boy. "The other name; not 'Master Ashley,' as you said just now."

"Philip," replied the child.

"Philip!"

"Philip Ashley, sir."

"And 'Ryle,'" interposed Sir Harry. "You remember, Major, it was you and I named him Philip Ryle."

"You are mystifying me," exclaimed the Major impatiently. "This is *not* the child I used to nurse at St. Ouest," he continued, turning sharply to Lady Ashley and Nana.

He gazed at both with his searching eyes. The coloured woman's face assumed an expression of terror, and she glanced at her mistress with an entreating, pleading look—as Major Hayne interpreted it.

"When you left the child he was only two months old," spoke Lady Ashley, with cold calmness. "How could you expect to remember him? Nothing changes so much as infants."

"But it is utterly impossible that any infant could change *like this*," *persisted Major Hayne.* "*He was as dark as* yourself, Lady Ashley; nay, darker, with your own large, bright black eyes."

Lady Ashley grew a little, a very little, perturbed. "He was dark in the first few weeks of his life," she said, "but after he had a touch of the fever—the same fever which attacked Sir Harry—the skin peeled off his face and he became fair, as you see him."

"But look at this child's eyes," repeated the Major, who seemed lost in wondering unbelief; "they are small and light; it is not possible they ever could have been a brilliant black, as his were. You are joking with me."

"I have no more to say," haughtily responded Lady

Ashley. "There stands the boy, light now, though he may have been as dark as Nana. I have not used white paint to him, and am not answerable for the changing of infants' complexions. Neither do I see what Major Hayne proposes to himself by holding this argument, unless he has a wish to dispute everything I say."

The Major was silent, as of course he had no alternative but to be. But as he turned to speak with Sir Harry on other topics, he caught the strange look of apprehension and distress on the servant's face, shining even through the copper colour.

CHAPTER X.

THE DELAYED WILL.

SIR HARRY waited up until nine that night, expecting the usual visit of Mr. Gay; then he was helped to bed. But scarcely had he left the library, which then only contained the Major, when the little man entered it, full of apologies. He had been called out to an earnest case, and could not quit it until that moment.

"Ned," cried Major Hayne, who was thoughtfully looking into the fire, "did you ever hear of black children becoming white?"

"Might boil 'em down, perhaps," answered the surgeon. "*I* never saw it done."

"You remember the child who was being christened the day I arrived here from India, ever so long ago, that little Carnagie? He had jet-black eyes and a swarthy complexion. Should you think such a child as that could ever turn fair, his skin white, and his eyes light?"

"Never. So long as oak and ash grow. Why?"

The Major did not answer. When he spoke again, it was on a different subject. "Doctor, I feel sure Sir Harry will not be here twelve months. He is worse than I expected to find him."

"Twelve months!" echoed Surgeon Gay. "Before the half of that time has elapsed, we shall have a Sir Philip Ashley."

"A big boy, that, for his age," carelessly remarked the Major, "especially for one born under his peculiar circumstances. Who do you call him like?"

"Himself, and nobody else," was the reply of the surgeon. "Carnagie was the image of his mother, and the girl is like the Ashleys; but Philip resembles none of them. I told my lady, one day, that had she not been with the boy in France, one might have said he was changed at nurse. Wasn't she angry with me! I had to beg her pardon."

"Sir Harry will see you, sir," said a servant, entering and addressing Surgeon Gay.

When Mr. Gay returned to the room, which he did for a moment before leaving, Major Hayne was in a deep reverie, not having changed his position.

"Major," said the surgeon, touching him to call his attention, "you are Sir Harry's oldest friend, and can presume with him more than I can. Try and find out if his worldly affairs are settled: if not, urge it. And persuade him to have further advice: it would be more satisfactory afterwards. He will not listen to me."

Major Hayne aroused himself and looked at the surgeon. "*Afterwards!*" he echoed. "Have you reason to fear that the end is very near?"

"There's a look in his face to-night that I don't like. If I am wanted, Major, I shall be at Mrs. Appleby's. The servants know it. Now for my trudge there in the snow."

"Does it snow still?"

"Flakes as big as a cheese-plate. Good night."

Major Hayne proceeded to Sir Harry's room. He was in bed, propped up by pillows, and panting for breath. "Sit here and talk with me, Philip," he said. "I have the most wretched nights. I often wish there was no night."

"Cannot you lie down more comfortably than that?"

"No; on account of my breath. Ah, Philip! a little

more painful breathing, the water a little higher, and the world will have seen the last of Hal Ashley. In a few days I shall be two-and-sixty: just the age at which my father died."

"You must have better advice," said Major Hayne. "Had I been here, you should have had it before."

"I had a physician at first, from Stopton, but he did me no good. Not as much as Gay does."

"Gay!" slightingly rejoined the Major, bearing in mind what the little man had just urged upon him; "he may be a knowing apothecary for the village aches and pains, but yours is a serious case. By the way, Sir Harry, have you made your will?"

"No."

"What! not provided for your children—not appointed their guardians!" exclaimed the Major, in tones between astonishment and reproach. "How can you be so careless, Sir Harry?"

"I know I ought to do it. I will one of these fine days, before I get any worse. I am too careless. My sister Bessy used to reproach me with its being my besetting sin."

"We have all a besetting sin," observed Major Hayne. "Never a man or woman was sent into this world without one. And we have striven but imperfectly to do our duty, if we have not found it out, and subdued it, long before we arrive at your age or mine."

"Philip, I shall leave you guardian of my children."

"I will not act," hastily interrupted Major Hayne.

Sir Harry stretched out his hand and clasped the Major's. "You *will* act, Philip. Remember our close and long friendship."

The Major hesitated. "Who is to be associated with me?"

"I thought of Arthur Ashley."

"Whew!" ejaculated the Major. "How will that please your wife, Hal? She holds him, I fancy, in little favour."

"He is upright and conscientious: and I wish to leave behind me a token of my confidence in him, and my regard. But if what I hear of his health be true, Arthur may not be long after me."

"In which case his son must be next to yours in succession."

"His eldest son. Ryle."

"And if that child of Arthur's should succeed in his minority, who would reside at Ashley? Your widow?"

"No, no; Ryle. Ryle and his personal guardian, who would, of course, be his mother. I trust in mercy it may never come to that: my wife would not bear to quit Ashley tamely. Why do you suppose so improbable an event? Philip is as strong and healthy as a young lion: there's no fear of his dying."

"How very extraordinary that a dark boy, as he was, should have become so fair!" remarked the Major. "Did you observe the change when Lady Ashley first brought him home, or has it come on by imperceptible degrees?"

"Not by degrees. When she brought him home I was amazed to see the child so changed, for it struck me that when I left him he was a swarthy little chap, something like poor Carnagie. But I thought my memory might play me false, for I was too ill to take much notice of him at St. Ouest, as you know."

There was a silence. Major Hayne broke it, speaking abruptly.

"Harry, you must do justice to Arthur Ashley. You never should have countenanced your wife in her infamous accusation."

Sir Harry groaned. "I was bewildered at the time,

Philip; I was, indeed. I have done latterly what I could to repair it, by speaking to my friends and neighbours upon the high estimation in which I hold Arthur."

"Is he well off?"

"He will be better off when I die. It is as much for him, as for anything else, that I ought to make a will."

"You would leave him money?"

Sir Harry indicated an answer in the affirmative, but his breath was growing alarmingly laboured. Major Hayne, unaccustomed to him, imagined it was but a usual occurrence, the effect of his lying down.

"If I am to act, Sir Harry, I must not be fettered by Lady Ashley. She——"

"Oh, Philip! raise me, raise me up!" almost screamed Sir Harry. "I shall suffocate."

The Major quickly passed his arm under the pillows. "Do you feel worse?" he whispered.

"Send for Gay," was the gasping answer.

Later that night, when the snowstorm had ceased and the surgeon sat by Sir Harry's bedside, a servant in the Ashley livery might be seen, by the light of the watery moon, speeding along to Stopton in search of a physician as fast as the roads would allow his horse to go.

With the alarm of DEATH, for it was indeed approaching, the pangs of remorse seized upon Sir Harry Ashley. Was there time to repair his dilatory carelessness? Barely. Upon how many death-beds does not the same remorse sit heavily! And, rely upon it, when the interests of this world have been so procrastinated, the same may be feared of those that pertain to the next.

When the physician came, he did not precisely say there was no hope, but he looked it. He remained until the morning and breakfasted with Major Hayne. Lady Ashley was not with them. Alarming illness in the house

made no change in her habits, and she did not rise until later; she then proceeded to the door of her husband's room. It was fastened, and she knocked sharply. Major Hayne opened it and came out.

"Sir Harry is giving his lawyer directions for his will," he whispered.

"I wish to go in," she said.

"Pardon me, Lady Ashley. They will soon have finished. Sir Harry requested me to keep the room clear until then."

She did not answer a word; she knew she had to deal with as determined a spirit as her own, but she sat down in the seat of one of the corridor windows and looked sullenly out on the snowy landscape. Presently the lawyer came out, bowed to Major Hayne, bowed lower to Lady Ashley, and passed down the staircase. They both went in then.

"I was bolted out," Lady Ashley resentfully began to her husband.

"My dear—I was telling Graystock—about you and the children—everything," panted Sir Harry. "I ought to have done it before."

"What was there to do?" inquired Lady Ashley, who positively was as ignorant of business matters as her little daughter, Blanche.

"Tell her, Philip," gasped Sir Harry. "I cannot talk."

The Major "told" her to the best of his ability, but he was lost in bewilderment just then, for he had heard a fact which had greatly astonished him—that there had been no marriage settlement upon Lady Ashley. No relatives were near her to urge it, and Sir Harry, in his unpardonable carelessness, had put it off from time to time, until it had been put off altogether. During his courtship he had thought of little save rendering himself agreeable to Miss Carnagie.

"What do you mean about 'guardians?'" interrupted Lady Ashley, as Major Hayne was speaking. "I am competent to take care of my own children."

"Oh, of course, as their mother, but there must be also guardians of their property and interests. It is necessary."

"Who are they to be?"

"Myself and Mr. Ashley."

Lady Ashley's eyes flashed fire. "Who appointed you—and *him?*"

"Sir Harry. No one else has the power."

Lady Ashley turned to her husband. "Sir Harry, you must undo this; you had no right to take such a step without consulting me. To Major Hayne I object, for I know that we shall but oppose each other. And as to Arthur Ashley," she added, her fingers closing tightly with resolution, "I swear that he shall never have authority over my children."

"Peace, peace, Lauretta," murmured poor Sir Harry. "I have been shamefully unjust to Arthur in the last few years of my life, playing by him the part of a coward. I cannot die until I have repaired it. Do not begrudge what I have bequeathed him. You and Blanche will have enough, and Philip will be far more wealthy, when his minority shall be over, than I have ever been."

Lady Ashley grasped the bedclothes, her fingers, in their passion, nearly meeting. "You have left money to Arthur Ashley!" she exclaimed. "You!"

"Not much. A poor requital for the accusation you cast at him and which I did not repel. Philip," he implored, his tone showing his helplessness, "let me have peace! I must be at peace in this my last day."

"I ask you," persisted Lady Ashley, "will you cancel what you have done? Will you countermand this will?"

"No," was the reply of her husband; "it is a righteous

and conscientious will. Ask Major Hayne; he will tell you so."

She turned to Major Hayne. "Is it made? irrevocably made?"

"It is being made. Mr. Graystock will bring it here, by-and-by, to be signed."

Lady Ashley said no more. In the afternoon, when Mr. Graystock came the second time, Sir Harry was gradually sinking. The lawyer read over the will. The Reverend Mr. Marsh, the incumbent of Ashley, and Squire Prout, who had come to have a last word with his old friend, were called into the room to witness it. Lady Ashley glided in after them, but remained out of view, behind the curtain.

The will was spread out before Sir Henry, who was raised and supported by Major Hayne. He had taken the pen in hand, when he suddenly looked up.

"Graystock, read that one part of it—relating to Arthur Ashley. It will do me good that my friend Prout should hear it in my presence."

Mr. Graystock read: "And whereas a cruel aspersion was cast upon my dear nephew, Arthur Ashley, to the effect that he had caused the death of my son, I desire in this, my last will and testament, to affirm, of my own knowledge, his entire innocence, and to declare that I have never for one moment believed or countenanced the aspersion. And I hereby bequeath to the said Arthur Ashley——"

"That will do," interrupted Sir Harry, motioning for the document to be again placed before him.

He signed the will, the witnesses testifying to his signature. "Thank God," he murmured, sinking back, "that the time to repair my carelessness has been accorded me!"

Mr. Graystock was folding up the paper, when Lady Ashley stole round the bed, and snatched it out of the lawyer's hands. She tore it in two pieces, and thrusting

them into the blazing fire, keeping them down with her hands, which must have received a scorching, she turned her dark, determined face towards Sir Harry.

"I told you," she uttered, "that Arthur Ashley should never have power over my children, neither shall he rob them of their money. I would rather tear him in pieces first, as I have torn your fine will."

Sir Harry raised up his hands and groaned aloud, whilst the astonished spectators stood round the bed, and stared in consternation at Lady Ashley. Sir Harry cast an imploring look at Mr. Graystock and at Major Hayne. "You both know my wishes," he gasped: "carry them out."

"The copy of this will is at the inn," quickly spoke up the lawyer. "Shall I fetch it, Sir Harry? Signed, it will be as legal as this."

"Fetch it, fetch it," was the eagerly assenting answer. "It is necessary for her sake, should anything happen to Philip."

Off sprang Mr. Graystock. But before he crossed the threshold of the door a sound recalled him, and he looked back to see Sir Harry in the death-struggle. It was a painful death, but a speedy one. In five minutes all was over.

"Your machinations have not prospered," uttered Lady Ashley, as she gazed in triumph at Major Hayne. "My son is Sir Philip Ashley, and I am uncontrolled."

CHAPTER XI.

BLANCHE.

SURELY the house was going to rack and ruin. Old servants, who had been in the family for years and years, were turned away, and a new, ill-organized set collected in their places. Even the steward was dismissed. The sober, steady lawyer, Mr. Graystock, the confidential adviser of the Ashleys, was also discarded, and Richard Storm, the rich but upstart attorney of Stopton, taken on in his stead. The tenants received notice of the raising of their rents, the poor cottagers of dismissal, the labourers had their wages ground down, and the annuities to the old pensioners were abruptly stopped. Never, surely, had a few short months seen similar changes.

Sir Harry Ashley had died without a will. His little son, who had succeeded to the title and property, had no legally-appointed guardian, and his mother, the widow, assumed control of everything. She was of warm blood, warmer than pertains to these European climes, and some of her acts were so outrageous, so wilfully unjust, that people began to say she was either a very bad woman or an insane one. Sir Harry had died in December, and thus matters went on until May; Lady Ashley perpetrating acts of injustice daily, and the neighbourhood crying shame upon her. Perhaps none let her know the estimation in which she was held in so marked a manner as did Mr.

Gay, the village surgeon and apothecary. Lady Ashley was ailing, or fancied she was, and sent for him. The little man fairly returned for answer that he would not attend her. If Master Philip—he begged pardon, *Sir* Philip—or Miss Blanche required his services he would walk his legs off to attend them at any hour of the day or night, but neither her ladyship nor her new servants need summon him: if they wanted a doctor, they might send to Stopton.

Stopton was four miles off, and her ladyship would have been delighted to dose Surgeon Gay with an ounce or two of his own arsenic. Failing the opportunity, she sent him notice to quit his house, but the little doctor had it on a lease, and snapped his fingers at her. Lady Ashley was very ignorant of business matters.

"How many years has the lease to run now?" demanded Mrs. Gay, in a fright.

"Four."

"Then at the end of the four she will be safe to turn us out, and there's no other house in the village to suit us! Whatever shall we do?"

"Don't look so scared, child," laughed the merry-hearted surgeon. "We'll manage to pitch our tent somewhere. Four years is four years. Somebody else may reign at Ashley by then."

Somebody else did.

On a summer day in May, when the hedges were fragrant with spring flowers, when the linden-trees were bursting out, and the oak-balls were growing large; when the cuckoo was crying its note, and the blue sky was serene and cloudless, the open barouche of Lady Ashley was seen winding from the village towards her house. She occupied one seat of it, in company with a snarling, snapping dog, "Trap." She was a handsome woman, dark as a gipsy, with an arrogant cast of countenance, and keen, flashing

eyes, her widow's cap suiting well her style of beauty. Opposite to her sat her children in their deep mourning, Blanche, an elegant child of ten, with delicate features, and flaxen curls shading her rosy cheeks, a perfect little beauty; Sir Philip, a stout boy of nearly six, his face broad and coarse, his eyes, hair, and complexion nearly colourless. Not one of the three bore the slightest resemblance to either of the others; but Blanche was very like her late father, Sir Harry Ashley.

The carriage was going at a slow pace up the hill, when an old woman, neatly attired, leaning on the arm of a stalwart man dressed in velveteen, approached it from the side of the road, her hands raised and her lips moving, as if she would crave speech of Lady Ashley. The latter haughtily averted her head, but a second thought seemed to strike her, and she ordered the coachman to stop.

It was Watson, the gamekeeper, and his mother. He had not been discharged with the rest of the servants: perhaps his turn had not yet come. He drew aside whilst the aged woman, very tall in her day, but stooping now, approached, and laid her hand on the door of the carriage for support, and addressed Lady Ashley in respectful terms, imploring the continuance of the pension she had so long enjoyed. Twice had she been to Ashley to endeavour to obtain speech of her ladyship, who had refused to see her.

"I will not renew your pension for a day," replied Lady Ashley. "You never ought to have had it: it has been so much money taken from my children."

"Oh, mamma," whispered Blanche, the tears rising in her blue eyes, "do give it her! Papa was so fond of old Hannah."

"My leddy, it is nae many years I can trouble the world. I am turned fourscore. It will be a hard thing for me to

go into the workhouse. Indeed, I was brought up far above what you see me now."

"Brought up to absurd Scotch superstitions," retorted Lady Ashley, "and the best thing you can do is to return and live amongst them. Do you see that child?" indicating her boy.

The old lady cast her dim eyes across the carriage, beyond Blanche. "God bless him for a bonnie boy!" she aspirated, "but he is nae an Ashley."

"Not an Ashley!" sharply spoke up her ladyship. "What do you mean, woman?"

"I mean nae harm, my leddy; ye didna think I could ever speak it of you or him. And if he has na the ken o' the Ashleys, he is but as God made him. The little lassie has, but nae he."

"He is Sir Philip Ashley," repeated Lady Ashley, with marked emphasis, bending her head forward, till her face was almost close to Hannah's. "You once insulted me by saying my child must be Sir Ryle, to inherit Ashley after his father."

"My leddy," cried the old woman, earnestly, "when they came home and told me good Sir Harry was gone, and that it was a Sir Philip who had succeeded him, I nae believed them, I didna indeed. I knew that in the course o' nature Sir Ryle ought to 'ha' come next, and I canna think now that it's a' canny, a' as it ought to be. We reckoned that the heir to succeed Sir Harry would be Master Ryle, Mr. Arthur's son. We knew there was this child of Sir Harry's, as well as Mr. Arthur himself; that stood between little Ryle and the title, but we believed that it would be surely brought about, as it always had been brought about, and that Master Ryle would now be the chief o' Ashley. My leddy, are ye sure that it is all straight? There was a Sir Murdoch cam into Ashley once, but he was proved to be

a usurper, and was driven out o' it. Are ye sure this child *is* the rightful heir?"

What there could have been to excite Lady Ashley in these words was best known to herself, but excited she was to unseemly fury, and she set the dog on the old woman. "Have at her, Trap! Seize her! Bite her! Hiss-s-s-s-s! Have at her, good Trap!"

The dog sprang at Hannah, fury, like that of his mistress, seated in his face. But generous little Blanche, with a cry of grief, threw herself before the helpless old woman, and the dog seized her by the chin.

Lady Ashley disengaged the dog, he was obedient to *her*, and Blanche, in the midst of her terror, thought not of her own hurt, though the dog had drawn blood. "Dear Hannah, good Hannah," she sobbed, clasping the aged hands, "I am very sorry. When I grow up and have money of my own, I will give it to you; you may be sure I will, because my dear papa did."

"God help us!" muttered the gamekeeper, as he sprang forward to drag his mother out of the way of the moving carriage, "and God help them who come after us, if Sir Philip should resemble his mother in wickedness of temper, as that drowned young Carnagie did!"

CHAPTER XII.

"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND."

LINDEN, the pretty house jutting on Ashley Park, was once more alive with voices, for Arthur Ashley and his family suddenly returned to it.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" demanded little Surgeon Gay, gazing in dismay at his shattered appearance.

"What have other people been doing to me?" retorted Mr. Ashley. "I have been ailing ever since the last spring I passed here, when I had inflammation of the lungs. I don't think I was thoroughly cured."

"I told you you were not. I told you you had no business to return to public life, worrying yourself over your political schemes."

"It is very easy to preach prudence, Gay, but when a man has a family to provide for, how can he sit idly down? My certain income, arising from Thorncliff, is barely four hundred a year, and, with this house, that is all I have."

"Better be idle than work yourself out of health and life, as you have been doing."

"Working for little end. I could not keep out of pecuniary embarrassment, and the annoyance that has caused me, combined with the frustration of my political hopes and the cloud which Lady Ashley managed to cast upon my name and spirit, have been too much for me.

Now that I can no longer stave off my illness, I have come back to Linden and quiet. I ruptured a blood-vessel about a month ago."

"Ah, it is the way with you all—putting off, putting off! If you had lived here, you would have been well now and have saved house-rent."

"That is why I have come," said Mr. Ashley, with a laugh, which sounded more sad than merry, "to save house-rent and to economize. "Will you believe it, Gay?" he added, dropping his voice; "we keep now but two servants. I cannot afford more, and Mrs. Ashley works herself to a skeleton amongst the children."

"I never could have thought to see that reverse of the natural order of things—an Ashley reduced to two hand-maids," observed the surgeon, his face twisted into a look of comical concern. "Why, I and Mrs. Gay manage as much as that. Oh, well, cheer up: Arthur Ashley will never stop long at that low ebb. You know that Sir Harry left you a handsome fortune, five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and that tigress of a woman destroyed the will?"

"I know, I know. I shall demand it of her. The money is mine by every law of justice."

"You will never get it," cried Surgeon Gay. "You can form no idea of the way she goes on, the awful things she does. A pretty life you and Major Hayne would have had of it with her as guardians to the children."

"Is Major Hayne here?"

"Major Hayne! he went off the day after Sir Harry's funeral. The neighbourhood was scandalized that you were not invited to it, and her ladyship had a few hard names bestowed upon her, I can tell you. Major Hayne called on me as he went away, and sat for half an hour on my surgery-counter, talking about her. She had turned him out of Ashley, she had. indeed, Mr. Arthur, as true as that

my name's Ned Gay. He said he was going, then, to see if he could make things right for you and your eldest son, and he might be back in a few weeks or a few months, as the case might be."

"Make things right for me and my son!" echoed Mr. Ashley. "Going where?"

"How should I know? To Timbuctoo, for anything I can tell. I could make neither top nor tail of what he said, and told him so, but he did not explain."

"When is the best time for seeing her ladyship?" demanded Mr. Ashley.

"She makes a point of being denied to every one who is on her bad books, go at what time they will. Squire Prout called one day, and my lady sent word out she was not at home, and stood at the French window all the while, staring him in the face. You will never get in."

"I will," replied Mr. Ashley. "And you have heard of the Ashley *will*. Sir Harry did not possess it, but my father and Sir Arthur did. I will try mine."

"If you would take my advice, you would not go at all. Great excitement might prove fatal to you: and I'll defy any one to stave off excitement, if they get into a contest with Lady Ashley."

"I must take care of my wife and children," was the reply. "I'll try and take care of myself."

That same evening, as Lady Ashley sat alone in her dining-room after dinner, the door opened and Mr. Ashley appeared before her. She was inexpressibly surprised, not knowing him to have returned to the neighbourhood, but soon her face lighted up into a glow of triumph, and she motioned him to a seat.

He sat down in the old seat of his boyhood, for it was the home where he had been brought up, brought up to consider himself its heir. And its heir he had been, until

she, with her studied fascinations, had wiled over his uncle in his advancing years to marry her, and so had deprived him of it.

"To what circumstances am I indebted for the honour of a visit from Mr. Ashley?"

"Your question and surprise are natural, Lady Ashley: for it is indeed a matter of astonishment that my footsteps should have brought me to this house, when it has ceased to be my uncle's."

"The house is mine," she answered, indecent satisfaction lighting her dark face. "You formerly thought that when Sir Harry was gone it would be yours."

"I did not come here to recriminate or to speak of the past, Lady Ashley," he observed, "but of the present. Sir Harry Ashley made a will before he died."

"He plotted one; he and Major Hayne. I prevented its being carried out."

"He *made* one, I believe," repeated Mr. Ashley: "made it and signed it."

"And I rendered it invalid, I tell you. I tore and burnt it before their faces. A couple of old idiots! with their annuities here, and their legacies there: the largest one was to Mr. Arthur Ashley. They bound my power down to nothing, and left him, one of the idiots, and Mr. Arthur Ashley, absolute over my children. Did you think I would submit to that, from what you knew of me as Lauretta Carnagie?"

She cast the light of her flashing eyes full upon him. He understood their strange, hidden meaning: understood it as none other could have done.

"The legacy was five-and-twenty thousand pounds, as I am given to understand," he resumed.

"I dare say it was, that or more. The amount is of no consequence."

"Of every consequence, for that legacy must be mine. Will you hear what I have to say, Lady Ashley—hear it without ridicule?"

"Say on."

"If you look at me, you will see that I must speedily follow my uncle. I am dying of the malady which took my father—disease of the lungs. Save a very poor income, I shall leave my wife and five children unprovided for. This money, which Sir Harry left to them, will increase it to riches—if we estimate riches by my present fortune; and it is theirs by every right. To you, Lady Ashley, it is a trifling sum, and your children will not miss it. Let it be theirs."

"Upon what ground do you urge your request?"

"The ground of right; of equity; and"—he sank his voice to a whisper, and drew his chair nearer to hers—"upon restitution. You know you owe me that, Lady Ashley, for to you I date the ruin of my health and prospects."

"Ah!" she said, whilst a curious smile curled her mouth.

"When you brought that foul accusation against me in the public road of this village, that I had drowned your child, an accusation which you knew to be as false as I did, depriving me of my seat in the House, turning the public mind against me, you struck me my death-blow. When I saw my friends looking coldly upon me—friends from infancy, who should have known me better—I could not bear up against it. Never strong, my energies seemed to desert me, and I have since then been a failing man, lacking the spirit to make things prosper. And now that I have confessed this, let it pass for ever. Take my forgiveness, Lady Ashley, now, as we sit here alone, for all you have dealt to me, but deal with compassion by my

children. For myself I do not ask the money: let it not come to them, if you will, until after my death."

"You speak of compassion," she returned; "which of us has most need of compassion, you or I?"

"I do not understand."

"If I have blighted your prospects, who blighted my heart, my fair morning of life?"

He repeated, "I do not understand," but this time in a faltering tone, as if he did understand, at least partially.

"When I came to Ashley, a young stranger, who praised my beauty, admired my waywardness, which others condemned, and strove in secret, with his honeyed words, to win the affections of my maiden heart? And when he had drawn me to love him, with a fiery, ardent passion that you cold Europeans little reck of, he told me that he had only been playing with me—that he loved another. Do you know who that man was, Arthur Ashley?"

He did not answer that it was himself, though he might have done so. But she certainly put the case strongly.

"I would have laid down my life for you," she went on, passionate tears forcing themselves to her eyes with the vivid painfulness of the retrospect. "I could have loved you for ever. You were, as I thought then, the undoubted heir to Ashley, but had you become a beggar, scorned, traduced, despised, I should have gloried in loving you all the more. I do not know—in spite of my hatred to you—that the love has quite left my heart."

"It was done in thoughtlessness," he murmured; "I never meant to make such an impression upon you. How could I, when I was engaged to marry Anna Rivers?"

"Don't mention her in my presence," she vehemently interrupted; "her name has been to my feelings, since, as a searing iron. And you come to ask aid for her and her children! You are a bold man, Arthur Ashley."

"Visit your reproaches upon me, Lady Ashley, but not upon my wife. She does not deserve them, for she was innocent and unconscious throughout the whole business. I alone was to blame, and perhaps you also, Lady Ashley, in some measure. But let us forget these grievances; surely they took place long enough ago."

"I told you that evening—you remember it—that I would never forget. I never will."

"But you will forgive?"

"I will never forgive, you or yours. You present yourself here to demand a fortune for your wife and children: I would not give them a piece of bread if they were starving in the streets. I hope that your conduct will be visited upon her for whom you forsook me; that in her lowly widowhood she will be overwhelmed with cares and poverty; that she will stop at Linden to live—or starve—and feast her envious eyes, daily, with my prosperity and my children's position and riches: the position she expected to occupy, when they deemed you the undisputed heir to Ashley."

"Cease, cease, I pray you," he implored, lifting his thin hands; "these sentiments are not befitting a woman; they would befit——"

"A fiend, perhaps you would like to say"—for he had hesitated. "Well and good. Who made me a fiend? You did, Arthur Ashley. In that one evening you changed my heart—happy in you and your image, and which you might have moulded to your will, even to good—you changed it into a sea of hatred, revenge, jealousy, all struggling for mastery as do the flames of a living fire. The struggle is not yet over, the revenge partly is: you and she are reduced to becoming my despised supplicants, and I reign at Ashley. Fare you well, sir. Our paths lie apart, as you willed it then."

She rose and pointed imperiously to the door. He rose also, and stood looking at her; possibly debating with himself whether he should make another effort to soften her. Soften that malignant countenance! With a cold motion of the hand, by way of adieu, he passed out of the room.

The disappointment seemed to have taken from him what little energy was left, and he would sit silent for hours, brooding over the gloomy prospects of his children when he should be no more. And so, May passed into June, when a rupture of a blood-vessel again took place, but a very slight one.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAJOR'S STORY.

ONE evening, towards the latter part of the month, a visitor was announced. "A gentleman," the maid said, and Arthur's tottering limbs rose to receive him. It was Major Hayne. Many years had elapsed since they met at the christening of Carnagie.

"Is this your wife?" exclaimed the Major, taking Anna's hands, and giving her fair cheek a fatherly kiss. "She does not look very strong."

"She is over-worked and over-anxious, Major. I told Anna yesterday, if I could have foreseen how all this was to end, I would never have married her. I shall soon leave her to a life of struggle with the world. Five young children, and very little provision for them."

"Oh, Major Hayne!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashley, the tears rising to her eyes, "if you could only persuade him to think of these things in a less gloomy light! I am as rich as I care to be; we manage very well. He thinks I have so much to do; but I am glad of it, for an active life suits me. I should be quite happy, if it were not for my anxiety about him: but I know he would get well, if he strove to rally his spirits."

"My dear, I have no doubt you are very comfortable and quite rich enough," said the Major, in a gay tone. "Your husband estimates his income by what it would

have been had he succeeded to Ashley, so of course it suffers by comparison. What should you say at coming into Ashley now, Arthur? You are still the next heir. Who knows but you may?"

"Who knows but I may be king of England?" retorted Mr. Ashley. "Sir Philip is a strong, hearty lad, and I am a dying man. It is but right that the direct heirs should succeed."

The Major gave a grunt, which ended in a laugh, rose, and walked sharply across the room, smiling still. He sat down again by Mr. Ashley.

"I have an old maxim, Ryle——"

"Arthur," interrupted Mr. Ashley.

"Never mind; you are more like your father than ever, and I forget to call you anything but Ryle. Who is that?"

A handsome boy of ten had entered the room, with the bright complexion, the fair curls, and the noble features characteristic of the Ashleys.

"That is Ryle, if you will," said Mr. Ashley. "My eldest son. Ryle, speak to Major Hayne."

The child advanced with the fearless step of a young chieftain, and held out his hand with a modest, pleasant look in his large grey eyes, as they were raised to the stranger.

"Upon my word, but you are a brave lad!" muttered Major Hayne, in tones of gratification. "You would make a fitter chief than the ungainly little chap who bears the title. What should you say at being called Sir Ryle?"

"I wish papa could have been Sir Arthur," answered the boy, boldly, "because he would not have turned off all the poor people. But Mr. Gay says that when Philip gets old enough, perhaps he will take them on again. Blanche would: she says so."

"Do you see much of your cousins?"

"No, sir. We met in the lane one day and were gilding oak-balls together, but when Lady Ashley heard of it, she flogged them both, and said she would flog them ten times worse if they ever spoke to us again. We are not so rich as they are."

"And if they grew poor and you grew rich—if you lived at Ashley, for instance, and Blanche and Philip in a small house like Linden—would you object to play with them because they were poor?"

"No, no," answered the boy; "I would ask them to come and live with us at Ashley."

"You'll do, my boy," exclaimed the Major. "Always be kind and considerate to others: remember to be so when you are Sir Ryle."

"You may go and play, Ryle," interposed Mr. Ashley, a touch of vexation perceptible in his tone. "For goodness' sake, Major," he added, as the lad left the room, "do not put such notions in the poor children's heads; it will only be worse for them hereafter. I strive to render them humble."

"I called in on Gay as I came along," observed the Major, "and a precious account he gave me of her ladyship. Why, she has been playing up Old Nick with the estate and the people since her husband died."

"Oh, it is shameful! It excites me to think of it. A disgrace to the very name of Ashley."

"Arthur," resumed Major Hayne, waiting till Mr. Ashley's fit of coughing had subsided, "I was about to say, when interrupted by Master Ryle, that I hold to an old maxim, 'Look on the bright side of things, but prepare for the worst.' I want you to do the same. You will get well if you take care——"

"The blood-vessel——"

"Nonsense about the blood-vessel! You'll get over it, I

tell you, if you take care; but, to carry out my maxim, I would have you prepare for the other side of the case. I once asked Sir Harry if he had made his will: permit me to ask you the same question."

"Yes: such as it is; with nothing to leave."

"Well, I would have you make another, and with the least possible delay. Send for your lawyer to-morrow morning—send to him to-night, that he may be here in the morning. Make it as if you—or Ryle, failing you—were in possession of Ashley. Leave directions for all things; the disposal of the property, the guardianship of your children; just as if you were the reigning baronet."

"But Philip is the baronet," returned Mr. Ashley, looking at Major Hayne as if he doubted his sanity.

"Never you mind about Philip. Do as I tell you."

"I cannot, Major Hayne. I cannot will away property that is not mine."

The Major rose from his seat and walked about, as before, glancing furtively at Mr. Ashley.

"Now if you could only undertake to keep yourself calm, and not excite that blood-vessel you are so fond of, I would let you into a secret. Do you think I may, Mrs. Ashley?"

"Certainly you may. Arthur's spirits and health are altogether too low, now, to be dangerously excited," she replied.

"Well, I'll try it," answered the Major. "You blamed me, Arthur, for raising notions in Master Ryle, but suppose I tell you that he is certain, if he lives, to be Sir Ryle Ashley?"

"I should say you were speaking very foolishly—with your pardon, Major."

"And if I add that he, Ryle, is the present heir-apparent?"

"That he cannot be. When I die, he will be Philip's heir-presumptive."

"But you are not dead: you are alive and talking. What a man this husband of yours is, Mrs. Ashley; persisting in putting himself out of the world, like this! Ryle is the present heir-apparent."

"To Philip?" uttered the bewildered Mr. Ashley.

"No. To you. What shall you say, yet, if I add that you are Sir Arthur Ashley?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mrs. Ashley, rising in concern, "Sir Philip must be dead! Poor child! What has happened, Major Hayne?"

"Not he, he is as live and fat as ever, but he is not Sir Philip Ashley. Arthur, you are the real, genuine, bonâ fide baronet, and have been since the moment of your uncle's death."

They sat in consternation. "It is not possible," whispered Mrs. Ashley.

"It is," returned the Major. "You, my dear, are the legitimate Lady Ashley, and that old harridan up at the house is only the dowager. It is true, as I am a living man. Now don't go and make your hands tremble like that, sir, or I'll unsay all I have said."

"Do explain yourself," gasped Arthur, falling back in his chair. "How can it be?"

"The boy, Philip, is a usurper, a palmed-off heir. Neither her child nor Sir Harry's."

"Not their child?"

"No more than he is yours or mine."

"But she was confined at St. Ouest of a male child, who was named Philip?"

"She was. But after I and Sir Harry departed, leaving her there, for she said, in her laziness, she was not well enough to travel, that child died. What did my lady do? Instead of writing to Sir Harry, she hushed the matter up, and took an infant in the village, who had lost its parents,

as Philip's substitute, and brought him home, six months afterwards, as the heir to Ashley."

"But," debated Mr. Ashley, running over probabilities and improbabilities in his mind, as a man of judgment never fails to do, "how could she have concealed it from the attendants, those she had with her?"

"She had only Nana, the coloured woman, who would go through fire and water at her bidding, and the child's nurse, a native of St. Ouest. Nana must of course have been in the secret, and the nurse she discharged when they reached Paris. Oh, I have got all particulars, signed, sealed, and sworn to, besides that very nurse, and a woman named Marie Baux, the false child's next-of-kin, from whom my lady got him, and a clerk from the *mairie*, as they call it, to swear to the register. He's a fellow with a beard a foot long, and frightened the barmaid at the Ashley Arms into hysterics when I took them there just now, to be lodged for the night."

"How came you with them?" inquired Arthur.

"I have been to St. Ouest, hunting them up, and a long job I have had of it, for some of them were scattered. When I came here last Christmas and saw Philip, his remarkable fairness struck upon me with wonder, and I told both Sir Harry and Lady Ashley he was not the child born at St. Ouest, for that child had been dark as night. They insisted it was; at least she did, Sir Harry only spoke from her: though he did tell me the change in the boy's skin and eyes had astonished him, when Lady Ashley first brought him home. Sir Harry's suspicions were not awakened; it was hardly likely; and it is as well they were not, with death so near. Mine, however, were more than suspicions, they were certainties, and away I went to St. Ouest. I found out my lady's trick, collected the evidence in all due form, the certificate of the real Philip's death and

burial, with the registering clerk, as I tell you, to swear to it, and brought the two women to confront my lady, in case of her proving restive. She'll have a surprise she little looks for to-morrow morning."

"It is wonderful!" uttered Mr. Ashley, scarcely able to believe his own senses.

"Rather so. My stars! what a mistake Sir Harry made in marrying that woman! But, Arthur, why do you suppose she did all this?"

"With the view to reigning over Ashley, I suppose, as mother of the heir."

"Guess again, my boy. That motive may have had its weight, but her chief aim was to prevent your succeeding to Ashley. Hatred to you, from all I can hear and see, seems to have been the moving spring of her married life."

"Ah, no doubt," answered Mr. Ashley, in evasive tones.

"And serve you right, Master Arthur, if her hatred had only extended to trifles," whispered the Major, beyond the hearing of Mrs. Ashley. "You young gallants think that to make sport of a woman's heart is fair game, but you get paid out sometimes."

"She has paid me out pretty sharply," responded Arthur, the tone of his voice betraying both consciousness and annoyance.

"She has, and be shot to her. Well, her turn will come to-morrow. Will you do what I suggested? Graystock I shall want myself, and have secured him, but you can have somebody from his office."

"You mean about my will. What hurry is there for a day or two?"

"It will be better done. I wish it."

"Then I will certainly do it. I am under unbounded obligations to you, Major Hayne."

CHAPTER XIV.

CHEATING DOES NOT ALWAYS PROSPER.

MAJOR HAYNE did not do his work by halves. He had made his preparations before his visit to Arthur, and the following day he waited upon Lady Ashley. Not alone. He had pressed into the service the high sheriff of the county, Colonel Rusherford, an old and faithful friend of Sir Harry's. Mr. Graystock, the lawyer, and little Mr. Gay, the surgeon, the Major also took with him. The French witnesses were close at hand.

Ferocious as Lady Ashley's fits of passion had sometimes been, they were as nothing compared with the one which overtook her when Major Hayne opened his business. She denied everything; she swore the child, Philip, was hers; she would have quitted the room and refused to listen, but they compelled her to remain. "When your ladyship shall be calm, we will discuss this matter quietly," said Colonel Ruskerford, "and the steps which must be taken."

"There is nothing to discuss," she impetuously retorted. "How dare you come here with your plotting tales that Sir Philip is not the rightful heir?"

"Philip Ashley died at St. Ouest, and was buried there," said Major Hayne. "He died of convulsions, and his grave is on the outside of the Catholic cemetery: and I have taken the liberty, ma'am, of putting a gravestone over it, which

you forgot to do. This child, whom you call Sir Philip, is Robert Baux, the son of the postilion who was killed driving you and Sir Harry into St. Ouest. Do you deny having adopted that man's child ?"

"It is false, it is an infamous fabrication," she reiterated, after a momentary hesitation. "I adopted no child, and my own did not die."

"Take care, Lady Ashley," interposed Major Hayne. "I have just returned from St. Ouest and have brought with me ample proofs. On the evening of the day on which your child was buried you went with Célestine, one of the maids at the inn, to Baux's house, and offered to adopt the infant orphan. Marie Baux, the aunt, to whom the charge of the postilion's children had fallen, delivered the infant to you then, and Célestine carried it to the inn. Célestine is here, Lady Ashley."

Lady Ashley was visibly startled. "*Here!*"

"Outside. Waiting to be called in."

"And you would believe the word of a miserable servant-girl in preference to mine!" she uttered, recovering her equanimity. "Colonel Rusherford, I am surprised that you should have lent your countenance to so infamous a business."

"Célestine is not alone, my lady," imperturbably proceeded Major Hayne. "Marie Baux is with her. And the wet-nurse is also with her; the one who nursed your child first, and this false Philip afterwards, and whom you sent back to St. Ouest, after reaching Paris. And the official who registered the death of your child has come over with the three women to take care of them."

"Lady Ashley," interposed Colonel Rusherford, "I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but the fraud is undeniable and the proofs are at hand. Under these circumstances, it will cause you least pain to give up Ashley quietly. I do not

mean this day—Sir Arthur would not wish that; but say between now and a week's time."

"*Sir Arthur!*" she ejaculated, as if paralyzed.

"Sir Arthur," calmly repeated Colonel Rusherford. "Ashley is his now, and he has been wrongfully kept out of it since his uncle's death."

"And in giving you a week to get out of it, ma'am, Sir Arthur and Lady Ashley will show more consideration for you than you have shown for them," added Major Hayne.

The words seemed to stun her. "Sir Arthur and Lady Ashley!" Had it come to that at last, after all her sinful manœuvring? She fell back in her chair, and her face assumed a livid hue through its dark skin.

"Should you ever cause one infant to personate another again, my lady," proceeded Major Hayne, "take care that their eyes and skin are not so remarkably dissimilar. There's the point that did for your scheme."

She sprang from her seat, fury in her voice and gesture. "I care not what you say—you are all in a plot against me. Philip is Sir Philip Ashley, and you shall not dispossess him."

Then they called in the witnesses, and the child, Philip, was fetched from the nursery by Mr. Gay. He alone would have been sufficient evidence, for he was the very image of Marie Baux, his father's sister. The latter clasped him to her with kisses and tears: she knew the Baux face; there was no mistaking it.

There is no necessity to pursue the bringing home of the proofs to Lady Ashley. They were too powerful to be confuted, even by her, or by a gentleman from the lawyer's office, who had been galloped for in red-hot haste; and the conviction forced itself upon her, in the midst of her stormy passion, that she must indeed abandon Ashley. And now arose a secondary punishment. Sir Harry Ashley, in his

will, had provided for the contingency of Philip's death, and Arthur's consequent succession, and had amply provided for his wife and Blanche. That will she had destroyed, and a large portion of the money that would have been hers, now came to Arthur Ashley.

When the sad dispute and the confusion of the day came to an end, the gentlemen quitted Lady Ashley. Mr. Graystock departed for home, but the other three turned towards Linden, to report to Sir Arthur. Who should they meet on their way but the gamekeeper, Watson, moving his goods and chattels; his old mother and youngest child seated at the top of the cart, his wife and the elder children walking behind it.

"Hallo, Watson!" cried Surgeon Gay, "where are you decamping to?"

"My lady has turned me out, gentlemen," sadly answered the man. "She gave me warning, and for fear I should not go to my time, which was to-day, sent in a man this morning to enforce it, and keep possession. I have taken a cottage over the hill, and Squire Prout has promised to find me employment. Oh, sirs! my heart's almost broken. I never thought to see Ashley come to this."

"Just turn the horse's head round," said Major Hayne.

"Sir?"

"Turn round and go back to the lodge and put your goods in again," he added to the bewildered gamekeeper. "If the man disputes it, tell him to come down to Linden, and get his orders from Sir Arthur Ashley. Her ladyship is nothing but the dowager, without any power whatever, for the child, Philip, was no son of Sir Harry's. Sir Arthur is your master now."

"The Lord be thanked!" uttered the relieved man. "It's like awaking from a nightmare."

"Are ye sure it is Sir Arthur, sirs?" cried the old lady

from her high seat, though tears of joy were falling from her eyes. "Are ye sure it is nae Sir Ryle?"

"Why Sir Ryle?" demanded Colonel Rusherford, with a smile. "Why not Sir Arthur?"

"Ye ken weel, Colonel Rusherford, that Sir Ryle must come after Sir Harry; that it always has come. I knew there was something not straight, not canny, when they said there was a Sir Philip; and I dinna think now it will be Sir Arthur."

"But it is Sir Arthur, ma'am," responded Major Hayne. "And has been ever since Sir Harry's death, if we had but known it."

"But we did nae know it, sir," persisted the old lady, "and he never reigned. No, no, it will nae be Sir Arthur, now, to come into Ashley."

They pursued their way, leaving the gamekeeper to turn his cart round. When near to Linden, little Ryle met them, running in great agitation.

"Oh, sir," he exclaimed to Surgeon Gay, "make haste to my dear father. He is a great deal worse, and his mouth is bleeding."

"The blood-vessel again!" muttered the doctor to Major Hayne; "this is what I feared when I told you yesterday to get him to a speedy settlement of his affairs. Come along, Master Ryle; let us have a run."

He was a spare, active man, and sped along as fast as Ryle. They soon gained the house. "You stop outside, my dear," he said, "while I go in."

"There's mamma watching for you," returned Ryle.

"Where is he, Lady Ashley?" asked the surgeon. "In which room?"

In the midst of her distress she started at the title, almost as the other Lady Ashley had done. Where ease and rank indeed her husband's, now that he was dying?

In a short time the doctor came out again. The two gentlemen and the little boy were on the lawn before the house. For merry Surgeon Gay, he was looking very sad.

"The old lady was right," he whispered to the former. "Sir Arthur was not fated to reign; this child is already chief of Ashley."

Ryle, of a quick, sensitive nature, whose fears were already on the work, noted the hushed voices, the pained looks. "Papa is worse!" he quickly cried to Mr. Gay, "and they have been telling me that he is Sir Arthur Ashley. Oh, sir! he is not dead, is he?"

"My dear child," said the surgeon, taking Ryle's hand, "your father is gone to a better world. See how bright and beautiful it looks up there," he added, pointing to the calm blue summer sky. "No storms, no anger, no death; all peace and love and pleasantness. I wish the time was come for us all to be there." But Sir Ryle sank down on the grass with a wailing cry.

On as fair a day as that, they entered on their home at Ashley; Lady Ashley, in her deep sorrow and her widow's weeds, with her younger children and her eldest child, its owner. Very speedily had Lauretta, Lady Ashley, when she found it must be, evacuated Ashley. Sir Arthur had desired, in the will made the morning of his death, that the property left to her by Sir Harry in the will which she had rendered nugatory might be given up to her *upon one condition*—that Blanche should be brought up at Ashley, under the care of his wife Anna. For the welfare of the little girl, and the honour of the name of Ashley, he would not suffer her to remain with her mother, if he could by any means prevent it. Lauretta, Lady Ashley, agreed to this, through her solicitor, Mr. Storm, and seemed rather glad than otherwise to be relieved of the trouble of Blanche.

She announced her intention of departing for India, the favourite home of her earlier days. England was a villanous country to live in, she said, and Englishmen were ruffians, false and detestable—she would take herself away from them. Major Hayne, who had the management of Sir Arthur's affairs, was in glee when he heard it, and sent a polite message back, that, failing an escort, he would conduct her thither himself, sooner than India should be disappointed of her. As to Philip (so to call him), he was laden with toys and sent back to St. Ouest, with his aunt and the other two, and the man with the beard, a small annuity being settled on him for life.

So the place returned to its former peace, for recent wrongs were all righted, and old Hannah Watson said she should wait her call for departure with calmness, now that Sir Ryle reigned, in his own turn, over Ashley.

THE ENGAGEMENT OF SUSAN CHASE.

THE ENGAGEMENT OF SUSAN CHASE.

CHAPTER I.

LIEUTENANT CARNAGIE.

A LADY and gentleman were pacing a covered walk one dull day in November. Both were young: he had something of a military air about him; a tall, thin man, very dark. She was fair, with a calm face and pleasant expression. Just now, however, her features were glowing with animation, her cheeks burning, and her eyes cast down; for he, Charles Carnagie, had been telling her that he loved her; and she would rather have his love than that of the whole world beside.

Lieutenant Carnagie had come on a visit in the neighbourhood. He had accidentally met with Susan Chase the very first day of his arrival, and he had contrived to meet her pretty nearly every day since, now some weeks, so that love had grown up between them. A gossiping letter, received that morning from a brother officer, spoke of a rumour that their regiment was about to be ordered to the West Indies: and this had caused him to speak out.

"You know, Susan," he said, "I cannot go without you."

A deeper blush still, then a troubled expression, and she

half raised her eyes. "Mamma will not consent to that; she will say I am too young."

"Susan——" laughed Mr. Carnagie.

"Yes. Well?" for he seemed to have found some source of amusement, and laughed still.

"Do you remember the other evening, when the Maitlands came to tea, and the conversation turned on marriage, your mother informed us she was married at seventeen. You are eighteen, so she cannot consistently bring forward your youth as an objection."

"Yes; but she also said that early marriages were——"

"That early marriages were the incarnation of imprudence and impropriety" interrupted Mr. Carnagie, "laying the foundation for all the disasters that flesh is heir to; from an unconscionable share of children, to a ruined pocket and wretched health. My dearest Susan, we will risk them all, and cite her own example when she holds out against us."

"Look at the rain!" suddenly exclaimed Miss Chase, as they came to an opening in the trees. "How long can it have begun?"

"It's coming down pretty smartly too. There are worse misfortunes at sea, Susan. We can turn back again and wait its pleasure. You are under shelter here."

"But indeed I dare not stay longer. I wonder what the time is? Will you look, please?"

Mr. Carnagie took out his watch. "It is at the moment of twelve."

"Twelve!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "*Twelve!* Charles, we have been here an hour and a half. What will mamma say?"

"Nothing. When she hears what we have to tell her."

"Oh, Charles! I only went out to take a message to

the cottage. And she knows I might have been back in ten minutes. Indeed I must hasten in."

He opened his umbrella, which he had brought with him, for rain had been threatening all the morning ; and, causing her to take his arm, held it over her. She walked timidly : it was the first time she had ever taken it : and the moment they came within view of the house, she relinquished it.

"Susan, what's that for ?"

"Don't you see mamma at the window ?" she faltered.

"Yes ; and I see that she is looking at us. Come, Susan, take courage ; a few minutes more, and she will know that it is all as it should be."

Mr. Carnagie took possession of her hand, intending to make it again a prisoner ; but Susan drew it away, and hurried off in the rain, leaving him and his umbrella to follow at leisure.

She bounded into the hall, out of breath. Her mother came and met her. Mr. Carnagie was not far behind.

"Susan, where ever have you been ?" exclaimed Mrs. Chase, motioning her into the sitting-room. "What has detained you ?"

Of course she had no excuse to offer, and she murmured something unintelligible, which Mrs. Chase only caught the word "rain."

"Rain ! you could not have waited for that. It has only just commenced. Where is it that you have been, Susan ?"

"I believe I detained her, Mrs. Chase," spoke up young Carnagie. "I was coming here, and met her, and we have been walking in the covered walk."

Politeness kept Mrs. Chase silent. But she did not allow her daughters to walk with young men, either in covered walks or uncovered, and she mentally prepared a lecture for Susan.

"Susan has been making me a promise," resumed Mr. Carnagie, folding and unfolding a piece of paper, which he took up from the table.

"Not to go out walking with you again, I hope," hastily interposed Mrs. Chase. "For I cannot sanction it."

"Not precisely that. Mrs. Chase, she has promised to be my wife."

Mrs. Chase was taken entirely by surprise. A chest complaint, from which she suffered constantly, caused her to be much confined at home, rarely, if ever, to accompany her daughters in their walks or evening visits; therefore she had seen little of the progress of the intimacy. Susan sat down on the sofa, and drooped her face, and nervously played with her bonnet-strings.

"Conditionally, of course," added Mr. Carnagie, "that you have no objection to offer. I trust you will have none, Mrs. Chase."

"Dear me! this is very sudden," was all that lady could find to utter aloud.

"My family—I believe you know—are of great respectability; and I possess a few thousands besides my commission. I will try to make her happy, Mr. Chase."

"I have heard you highly [illegible]tly too[illegible] by Sir Arthur, Mr. Carnagie. But still—you must allow me to consider this seriously, before giving a final answer."

"Oh, certainly. I did not expect anything more. If you will kindly not take too much time," he added, "for I believe there will be little time to spare."

"I do not understand you," said Mrs. Chase.

"I had a letter from Drake, of ours, this morning, and he tells me there's a rumour that we are to be sent off to the West Indies."

"And you wish for an answer before you leave? That is natural. You shall have it."

"My dear Mrs. Chase -I wish for *her* before I leave. I must take her with me."

"Take—are you speaking of Susan?" uttered the astonished Mrs. Chase.

"Of course I am. Several of our officers are married men, and their wives will accompany them out."

"If Susan were older I would not say you nay: only three or four years older."

"I cannot go without Susan. I never could endure to leave her behind me, with nothing more binding between us than an engagement: I might have to stop out there for years, before I could get leave to come home and claim her. Dear Mrs. Chase, if you are satisfied with me in other respects, you must give your consent to our being married at once."

"Mr. Carnagie! Do you know Susan's age?"

"Yes. Eighteen. And you," he added, with a half-smile, "were seventeen when you married. I heard you say so."

Mrs. Chase looked vexed. "True; that was my age," she answered: "and it is that very fact which has set me against early marriages for my children. They are a great mistake.—Susan, where are you going? Stay and hear what I have to say: it is now fitting that you should do so. Sit down again. I have scarcely enjoyed a day's peace since I married, Mr. Carnagie. I had many children, and have had nothing but worry, noise, bustle, toil! Oh, you don't know the discomfort of early marriages: and I almost made a vow that my daughters should not marry until they were of a proper age."

"May I inquire what you would call a proper age?" he asked, suppressing a smile.

"Well—I think the most proper and the best age would be about five-and-twenty. But certainly not until twenty was turned."

"Susan wants only two years of twenty. Dear Mrs. Chase, I must plead that you change your resolution in her case. Were I stationary in England, and could occasionally see her, it might be different. I must take her with me."

"You are not yet sure of going."

"No, I am not. Drake thought——

"We will not discuss it further for the present," interrupted Mrs. Chase. "You have nearly startled me out of my sober sense and judgment."

"Very well. May I come in to-morrow morning?"

"If you like. I will then say yes or no to the engagement: but without reference to the marriage."

"Now mind, Susan," he snatched a moment to whisper, "if your mother still holds out, and vows we must wait an indefinite number of years, we will not wait at all, but just elope, and settle it that way. It's most unreasonable of her. I can't wait for you, and I won't."

Susan smiled faintly. She was not one of the eloping sort.

The next morning came. Mrs. Chase had resolved to accept Mr. Carnagie, finding that Susan's "mind," as she called it, was set upon him; and indeed, there was no reason why she should not accept him: but when Mr. Carnagie came, she found there was something else to be settled. He had received a summons to join his regiment, which was then quartered in Ireland, and also a positive, though not official notification, that it was ordered to the West Indies, and would be away in two months. Now, was Susan to go with him or not? Mrs. Chase said no, he said yes: and after much argument on both sides, and some slight indication of relenting on hers, they somehow came to the conclusion that Susan herself should decide the matter.

"My dear, decide *prudently*," cried Mrs. Chase. "Think

well over the fatal objections I have pointed out. Prudence, mind!"

"Susan, my darling, decide bravely," cried he; "don't be afraid. Think how happy we shall be together!"

And poor Susan, amidst a rush of colour and a flood of tears, decided TO GO.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Mrs. Chase, "there will be no time to prepare you a suitable trousseau, Susan."

"No time!" echoed Mr. Carnagie. "I could get an outfit made and packed in three days, and Susan has twice as many weeks. I should think she might buy up half the shops in Great Britain in that time."

Mr. Carnagie made the best of his way to Ireland, and Susan made the best use of her hands and energies in preparing for her change of prospects. In seven weeks they were to be married, and in eight to sail. Mr. Carnagie had interest with his colonel, and had no doubt of obtaining another short leave of absence. During this time Mrs. Chase had Susan's miniature taken—to console them, she said, when Susan should be gone. It was a good likeness, but it flattered her. Susan wrote a merry account of this to Mr. Carnagie.

One day, when Susan's friend, Frances Maitland, had come in to help her with some delicate work, she began speaking of the disposition of Mr. Carnagie.

"Susan, tell me: do you believe he is, on the whole, calculated to make you happy?"

"Is there any reason why he should not be?" was Susan's answer.

"He is so fearfully passionate."

"Who says so?" demanded Susan, in tones of resentment.

"Oh, he is. Ask the Ashleys. There was something up about a dog. It was when Charles Carnagie was stopping

there. He completely lost all self-control, and rushed to his room for his sword. Bessy met him on the stairs; he was brandishing it, and looking like a madman. She says there was an awful scene. Arthur declares he never before saw so violent a temper."

"Charles must have been greatly provoked," remarked Susan.

"He provoked himself, I believe. However, Susy, it is your own affair. I'm sure I don't want to set you against him. Marriage is a lottery at the best: 'for richer for poorer, for better for worse.' You will soon have to say that, you know."

Susan Chase had not soon to say it. The time of the wedding drew on, and on the day previous to that fixed for it, Lieutenant Carnagie arrived at Stopton, having obtained his leave of absence. Mrs. Chase's house was at some distance from it, but it was a fine, frosty morning, and he set out to walk.

He had come nearly in view of the house when he met a funeral. It startled Mr. Carnagie considerably, for surely it had come from the very house he was bound to. There were only some half-dozen cottages besides, that the road led to, just there, and that style of funeral was not likely to come from a cottage. He vaulted over a gate by the roadside, and peeped at it through the hedge; a hearse and several carriages. When it had passed, he came forth again, leaned over the gate, and gazed after it. Some children drew near, slowly following the sight in awe, gazers like himself.

"Who is dead?" he inquired of them. "Who is it that is being taken to the churchyard?"

"Mrs. Chase, sir."

"Mrs. Chase!" he uttered, horror-stricken. "What did she die of?"

The children did not know. Only that "she had died because she was ill."

"Can you inform me what Mrs. Chase died of?" the young officer repeated, for a woman now came up. "Was it any accident?"

"No, sir, no accident. She has been ailing a long time, some years, and she got suddenly worse at the last, and died," was the woman's answer, who evidently did not know Mr. Carnagie. "It was so quick, that her sons did not get here in time to see her, nor the little miss that was at school."

He was terribly shocked, scarcely able to believe it.

"When did she die?"

"On Tuesday, sir. Four days ago."

"Are they not burying her very soon?"

"Well, sir, the funeral was first fixed for to-morrow—I know all about it, you see, because I have been in there, since, helping the servants. But to-morrow, Saturday, was to have been Miss Susan Chase's wedding-day, and I believe she couldn't bear the idea, poor thing! of the funeral's taking place on it—what was to have been so different. Then the next day was Sunday, and some of the family did not like that day, and one of the sons was obliged to be back at his college on Monday. So they settled it for to-day."

Stunned with the news, Mr. Carnagie turned back. There seemed an indelicacy in his going to the house at that moment, and he waited till the after-part of the day, and went then. A servant showed him into a darkened room, and Susan came to him.

He thought she would have cried herself ill. Her emotion was pitiable. He clasped her in his arms, and she lay there and sobbed, almost hysterically, as a child cries. She could give him very little more information than had previously

been imparted. Their dear mother's complaint had taken an unfavourable turn, and had carried her off, almost without warning. One of her brothers, Susan said, had written to him on the Tuesday night, after it happened. Mr. Carnagie had left Ireland before the letter got there.

"Susan," he whispered, when she was a little calmer, "must this entail a separation on us?"

She looked at him, scarcely understanding.

"Must we wait? Must I sail without you?"

"Charles, that is almost a cruel question," she said at length. "How could you ask it? Would you have me marry you before my mother is cold in her grave? A year, at any rate, must pass over."

"It may be much longer than that. I shall not get leave so readily again. Oh, Susan! this is a hard trial."

"It is the will of God," she sighed, "and we must bear it."

"I shall not bear it patiently. I shall get marrying one of the copper, half-caste natives, out of defiance, or something as desperate. Fancy what it will be—condemned to vegetate by myself in that stifling climate, and you some millions of miles away!"

Susan was silent, pained at the tone of the remark. At that moment a girl of fifteen opened the door and looked in; wearing deep mourning, like herself.

"Come in, Emma, darling," she fondly said, drawing her sister towards her. "This is Mr. Carnagie, who was to have been so nearly related to us to-morrow. Charles," she added, "were there no other reason, I must have stayed to protect this child. My mother specially bequeathed her to me."

Emma Chase, who bore a resemblance to her sister Susan, felt a restraint in this stranger's presence, and she quickly and silently withdrew.

"Well, this is a gloomy prospect for us, Susan," resumed Mr. Carnagie, who could not get over his disappointment. "What I say is no mere joke—that it may be years before I can come to fetch you."

She raised her eyes to his, in all the expression of their trusting confidence. "No matter how many, Charles, you will find me waiting for you."

"But it is hard, for all that."

"Do you think—pray forgive me if I suggest anything wrong, or unpleasing—that if you were to return at once to your duty, without taking the leave granted you now (excepting the time occupied in travelling, which cannot be avoided), that they would be more inclined to allow it you when you next ask for it? It is an idea that has occurred to me."

"Perhaps so. It is not a bad notion. But, Susan, I would rather spend it with you."

"We are so sad just now," she murmured; "all the house is sad."

There was something in her tone which seemed to convey an intimation that his presence might not be acceptable to that house of sorrow; or at least Mr. Carnagie fancied so. And he did think her suggestion of going back to his duty a good one.

"Then, Susan, I think I had better make up my mind to leave you, and start back this very night."

"It may be better," she answered, the tears standing in her eyes.

"And in another year, my darling, if all's well, I trust I shall come and claim you."

"I trust so," she whispered.

He had in his pocket her wedding-ring, which he had bought as he came through Liverpool, and he drew it forth, and slipped it on to her finger—on the finger he ought to

have slipped it on in church on the morrow. "There, Susan; now that binds you to me. Let it remain there till—until I take it off only to put it on again."

"Not on that finger," she remonstrated, her pale cheek flushing.

"Why not?"

"Strangers will think that I am married."

"And in one sense you are so, for we are married in heart. Let it remain there for my sake."

"Very well," she murmured.

"Susan, I must now ask something else. The miniature that was taken of you."

Susan hesitated. It was still in her mother's room, in what she used to call her "treasure drawer."

"I was to have had the original, and they the likeness," he said; "but now that the original will be left at home, I may surely take the miniature. Let me have it, Susan."

She went and fetched it.

"And now I will bid you farewell, for if I am to go, I must start at once," he said, straining her to him. "God bless you, my love! my darling wife that was to have been! Be true to me, Susan, as I will be true to you."

He departed. But he did not return to his duty, as they had agreed. He meant to do so, but he returned by way of London, and the attraction of the capital proved too much for his resolution. In due course he departed with his regiment for Barbadoes: and poor Susan Chase remained at home, to pine after him, and to wear the plain gold ring he had placed on her finger.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOME AT LAST.

THE quay at Liverpool was alive with bustle and noise, for a large West Indian ship had just arrived after its prosperous voyage. It was a winter's day: the cold made itself felt, and the passengers, when they left the ship, were not sorry to hasten to the shelter of warm hotels.

One of them, a young and good-looking lady, only entered an hotel to leave it again. As soon as a post-chaise could be got ready she took her seat in it to go farther on. She looked ill and careworn, as if her health or her mind had suffered: perhaps both.

"It is an expensive way of travelling," she said to herself, "but it was better to come on. Another night of this suspense, now I am so near to them, would have seemed longer than all the rest. I wonder whether I shall hear of her? I wonder whether she has made her way to our home?"

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when she reached that home. A servant, whom she did not recognize, answered the summons at the door.

"Is Miss Chase within?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh, I am very glad! See to the luggage, will you? I will go on in."

"The luggage! Is it to come here, ma'am?"

"Yes," smiled the traveller. "You are strange in the house, or you would not ask it. I am Miss Susan Chase."

The girl's eyes brightened with intelligence. "Oh, ma'am! I think Miss Ursula has been expecting you. I am pleased you have got home safely, from such a long way."

Ursula Chase was sitting near the fire, reading by the light of a shaded lamp, which, though it threw its brightness on the page, cast its shadow on the room. She turned round when the door opened, and saw, indistinctly, a figure muffled up.

"Ursula, don't you know me?"

"Susan! Susan!"

Ursula, always cold and calm, was aroused out of her nature. She loved her sister Susan better than any one in the world: or, it may be more correct to say, she loved no one but Susan. She clasped her, she hurried off her wrappings, she gently pushed her into an easy-chair; and, finally, sat down in her own, and burst into tears. The equable, undemonstrative Ursula Chase!

"Forgive my being absurd, Susan; but I am so rejoiced to have you back, safe and sound."

She had set Susan on, and she was crying also, far more bitterly than Ursula. The many disagreeable points of her ill-omened visit were pressing painfully on her remembrance, and she sobbed aloud.

"I wish I had been guided by you, Ursula, and had never gone! I shall repent it as long as I live."

"Well, well, it is over and done with. I will make you some tea. You look as if you had been ill, Susan."

"I have been very ill."

"On the voyage home?"

"No. At Barbadoes."

Ursula ordered the tea in, and busied herself in making

it. "I am so delighted to see you," she said, "that all my scolding has gone out of my head; but I assure you, Susan, I had prepared a sharp one for you."

"For my having gone out?"

No. Those old bygones must be bygones. For not having come home with Mrs. Carnagie. How could you think of remaining behind?"

Susan's heart leaped into her mouth. "Did Emma—did Mrs. Carnagie come here on her return?"

"Yes. She is here now."

"Now! In the house?"

"Not in the house. She is spending the day at the Ashleys'."

"Did she say why I did not come with her?" inquired Susan.

"I could not get from her why you did not come—or, indeed, why she came herself. There is no cordiality between us. Had I been here alone, I should have been tempted to refuse to receive her. But Henry happened to be at home then and was pleased to welcome her, and it is his house, not mine. When he went away again, he charged me to make her comfortable as long as she liked to stay here. I questioned her as little as possible, but the excuses she gave sounded frivolous to me—that you were not ready, and stopped to nurse Mr. Carnagie, who was going to have a fever. It struck me that she ought to have assumed the authority vested in a married woman, and insisted on your returning with her. Susan, I have said that I am not going to scold you now; but Mr. Carnagie's house was not quite the place for you, unsanctioned by the presence of his wife."

"No, it was not," spoke Susan, in resentful tones, for Emma's heartless conduct aroused every spark of indignation within her. "She should have told you the truth—that

she gave me no chance of coming with her. Ursula! she ran away from Barbadoes."

Ursula had the teapot in her hand, preparing to pour out the tea. She put it down, and turned her eyes on Susan. "Ran away!"

"Clandestinely. We knew no more of her leaving than you did. She dressed for an evening party, went to it—as I supposed—and never came home again. The next day we found that she had sailed for England."

"And her reason?" imperiously demanded Ursula, who had never any charity to spare for ill doing.

"I have not seen her since, you know. She and Mr. Carnagie were not very happy together."

"That is more than likely," responded Ursula, in a marked tone. "But Mr. Carnagie ought to have told you, if she did not. Of course," she added, an unpleasant idea obtruding itself, "she did not come without his sanction?"

"Yes; and without his knowledge also, Ursula. And what made it worse, he was sickening for a fever; and, for all she knew, he might have died in it."

"That's the fever she has hinted at. Which you, she says, remained to nurse."

"I did help to nurse him through it. And took it myself, and nearly lost my life."

Ideas crowded fast upon the mind of Ursula Chase. Her brow contracted. "Were you laid up there—in his house—alone?"

"Not alone. A friend, a widow lady, came to be with me the day after Emma left. And when I was well enough, I removed to her house until I sailed."

"It is the most incomprehensible story altogether!" uttered Ursula. "I mean Emma's proceedings. What did she leave Barbadoes for? What does she do in

England? All I have heard her say about it is, that her health was bad, and she wanted a change. It appeared to be good enough when she came here."

"There was nothing the matter with her health. Ursula—the worst part of the history remains behind: she did not come away alone."

"I know that. Ruth came with her. The girl has leave for a week now, and is gone to see her friends."

"I do not mean Ruth. She had made herself——" Susan hesitated: between her strong hope that Emma might be innocent, and the obligation that was upon her to disclose the plain truth, she was somewhat at a loss how to frame her words—"Emma had made herself conspicuous with a friend of Mr. Carnagie's; had been too much in his company; too free in her manners with him. He"—Susan dropped her voice to a whisper—"left Barbadoes with her."

Ursula turned white. And her tone, as she hastily rejoined, rose to a shriek.

"His name was not Chard? Susan, it was not Chard?"

"Captain Chard," was Susan's sad rejoinder.

Ursula's face presented a picture of dismay. After a pause, she spoke.

"He came here with her."

"Came here!" echoed Susan. "Did he stay here?"

"No. A couple of hours only. She introduced him to Henry as a friend of Mr. Carnagie's, who had taken charge of her over. Susan! she has a letter from that man every morning—every morning of her life. One day Henry asked her who her regular correspondent was, and she acknowledged it was Captain Chard; she said he was transacting business relative to Barbadoes, and it was necessary she should be kept informed of its progress. What are we to do with her? If she is—what she may

"Are you aware that he is following you to England?—and for what purpose?" sternly demanded Ursula.

"To get a divorce, I hope," was the cool reply.

It struck Ursula dumb.

"If he has any spirit, he will sue for a divorce, that's all," added Mrs. Carnagie.

"Oh, you wicked woman!" uttered the indignant Ursula. "To come here, in brazen impudence, and bring *him* with you! That man! Did you forget, madam, that this was a respectable house—that it was once your mother's, and that it is now mine?"

"Forget it, no," said Emma; "and I am quite as respectable as you are. And so is he."

"Susan, is she mad?"

Emma advanced forward, her whole face lighted up with passion. "I have done no wrong," she said. "I left my home in the way I did to get rid of my husband, rid of his name, and to become free again. I concerted my plans with Captain Chard. When Mr. Carnagie sues for a divorce, which of course he must do, he will obtain it, for it will be unopposed, and then I shall become Captain Chard's wife. He has loved me long, and I love him. I have done no wrong," she repeated, with flashing eyes, "and Captain Chard would not lead me into it; but rather"—she dropped her voice—"than not be rid of Lieutenant Carnagie, we would run away to-morrow."

"Oh, Emma!" exclaimed Susan. "If we believe you, can you expect the world will do so?"

"It will have to. Once let the divorce be pronounced, and we shall make our assertions good. Ruth can bear good testimony, and so can others. Mr. Carnagie has had a letter before this, despatched on my arrival here, that will sting him into seeking a divorce: it was purposely worded for it,".

"Are you not afraid of other consequences than a divorce?" asked Susan. "Mr. Carnagie is bitterly indignant against Captain Chard. He says he will shoot him."

"Two can play at that game," retorted Mrs. Carnagie.

"I hope," uttered Ursula, in fervent tones, "that your Captain Chard will be drummed out of the regiment. A reputable commander!"

"Too late," sarcastically rejoined Mrs Carnagie. "He has sold out."

"The kindest thing that could have happened to you would have been a shipwreck to the bottom of the sea," repeated Ursula.

"Thank you. The waves were not of your opinion, you perceive I hope and trust *he* may get shipwrecked coming over. It would save a world of trouble, and I and Captain Chard would hold a public rejoicing over it. Have you any more fault to find with me? Because, if not, I am going up to bed"

No reply was made, and Mrs. Carnagie quitted the room.

"Susan," muttered Ursula again, "is she mad? What will become of us all, in the eyes of the world?"

"Can what she says be true?" asked Susan. "I am inclined to believe it.'

"What difference does it make, whether true or false?" retorted Ursula "We know the construction that must be put on such conduct. I shall write to Henry; a letter that will bring him home If he persists in allowing her to remain in the house, I shall leave it."

CHAPTER IX.

FRANCES MAITLAND'S ANGER.

TWELVE months more passed away, and Emma Carnagie's strange plans were bearing fruit. Mr. Carnagie had lost no time; the very ship which had brought Susan home, had also brought certain instructions from Mr. Carnagie to his solicitors, and he had followed them later. An action was forthwith commenced against Captain Chard, "Carnagie *v.* Chard." It was undefended at the trial, and judgment and damages were suffered to go by default. In early spring, seventeen months after her departure from her husband's home, Mrs. Carnagie was pronounced to have forfeited all claim to his name for ever. During the proceedings, Mrs. Carnagie had resided with one of her brothers, for Ursula had been bitter, unforgiving, and vehement.

Before the divorce was finally pronounced, Susan and Ursula were invited to spend some time with an aged relative in Wales. They accepted it readily, glad to be away from their own neighbourhood for a while: Ursula was wont to declare, every time she went out, that the people "looked at her," as if to remind her that she was the sister of Mrs. Carnagie. They were away three months, and the chief change which they found on their return was, that their rector had obtained a six months' leave of absence, and a stranger was residing in the rectory and officiating for him.

On the following day, Sunday, they went to church as usual. The new clergyman had just ascended the reading-desk. Susan looked at him: she rubbed her eyes and looked again; it was surely Mr. Leicester, whom she had left in Barbadoes! And now their gaze met, and there was no longer room for doubt.

"I like him very much!" cried Ursula, alluding to the new clergyman, as they were walking home from church after service. "I wonder who he is?"

"I can tell you," said Susan. "It is Mr. Leicester. I know him, Ursula."

"You! Where have you known him?"

"In Barbadoes. He had a church there. It was to his house I was removed from Mr. Carnagie's. You have forgotten the name, perhaps. It was his sister, Mrs. Freeman, who nursed me through the fever. They were very kind to me, and I am under great obligations to them."

"Is he married, this Mr. Leicester?"

"No. At least he was not then."

"There was a lady in the parsonage pew?"

A quick step behind them, a step Susan thought she remembered, and she turned round to find her hand taken by Mr. Leicester, a tall, fine man, with an intellectual countenance. What with old recollections, and perhaps conscious present feelings, Susan felt her face become one crimson glow, as he held her hand and looked into her eyes.

"My sister, Ursula," she said, turning them away. "I do not know when I have been so much surprised as to-day, Mr. Leicester."

"To see me officiating in your own parish," he laughed. "When you left me far away, not so very long ago."

"Have you come over on leave of absence?"

"I have come over for good. My health has been very

indifferent for twelve months past, so I resigned my appointment there. I am in expectation of preferment in England, but meanwhile this offered and I took it."

When they arrived at their house, he entered with them. Ursula went upstairs to take off her things, Susan remaining in the drawing-room with Mr. Leicester.

"May I inquire after your sister?" he said in low tones.

"She is just married again. They were married the instant it was possible after the divorce was obtained. You must have heard that amongst our friends here, for I have no doubt they have been full of it."

"Yes, it has been a prolific topic," replied Mr. Leicester. "The marriage was also in the newspapers."

"In every newspaper in the United Kingdom, I think," returned Susan, her tone betraying her vexation. "All possible publicity that could be given to it, Captain and Mrs. Chard gave. They sent out cards and cake to every family they knew."

"They are travelling, are they not?"

"They have gone to Germany, I believe. But we have held no communication with themselves. My sister Ursula resents Emma's conduct deeply."

"But if Mrs. Carnagie is to be believed, there was little to resent. So the neighbourhood has it."

"I think she is to be believed; in [illegible]here appears to be no doubt about it. But we feel [illegible], even at its best, she has brought great disgrace into the family, and Ursula will never forget or forgive it."

"Mr. Carnagie is also about to marry again."

"Is he?" exclaimed Susan.

"You remember those wealthy planters on that large estate a few miles off Barbadoes?"

"Yes. The Prance estate, you mean."

"He is going to marry Miss Prance."

"Why, she was [redacted] after a pause of amazement.

Mr. Leicester nodded. "It has caused a good deal of surprise in Barbadoes. She will have a very large fortune."

"It was said she was very cruel," observed Susan, "and would beat her slaves with her own hand."

"And I know that to be true," said Mr. Leicester. "However, Mr. Carnagie is to marry her. He was only waiting for the necessary time to elapse after the divorce."

"I heartily wish him more happiness than in his last marriage," said Susan; "and perhaps he may find it, although she is half-caste. When she is an Englishman's wife she may be taught that slaves are possessed of human feelings, as she is, and learn to treat them kindly."

"Did you see Mr. Carnagie when he was in England?"

"Yes. He came here; but it was only a passing visit," answered Susan. "I was glad when he went back again; I was always fearing that he and Captain Chard might meet. Mr. Carnagie came over intending to challenge him; but his lawyers told him that if he took the law into his own hands he would not get his divorce. I suppose they only said it to prevent bloodshed. How is Mrs. Freeman? Did she co[redacted] with you?"

"No; she [redacted]lings, [redacted]n Barbadoes. She is Mrs. Grape now. I have an elder [redacted] held [redacted]aying here with me—Miss Leicester."

"Do you like [redacted] [redacted]ighbourhood?"

"Not so well as I had anticipated. I shall like it better now I hav[redacted] old friend in it," he added, with a smile. And Susan's colour deepened again, for which she could have boxed her own ears.

The time went on. The neighbourhood, to whom Frances Maitland's flirting propensities were nothing new, grew into the habit of joking her about Mr. Leicester. She was little

he was to be married—and as it was
e was—often as she had striven to
d end by setting her cap (the popular
, she had never set it so strenuously,
o had so won upon her regard, as Mr.
grew to show it too plainly. Frances
where he would, he met her—in the
, amongst the poor, and in the vestry
or Frances had constituted herself a
had for ever some question to ask
e was very handsome, with beautiful
nt dark eyes, and, like too many other
thought herself irresistible.
this she did not get on. No, do what
did not advance a step nearer her hope than
the commencement. Mr. Leicester was
s polite, often conversed with her, but
could not betray a deeper interest. "I
Frances to herself, "whether he has any
here! Perhaps he has left some one behind

ing your time," Miss A[illegible]ther abruptly
e hot summer's day, as she came upon
the park.
ured Frances.
Mr. Leicester."
!" uttered Frances. "W[illegible] next? I
"

not shine, does it, Frances? It's not
this moment?" ironically returned Miss
hat are you sitting on this bench for
him as he goes by from the cottages?
ceptive faculties, in these parts, are not

"I don't care whether they are buri
retorted Frances. "I suppose I may sit
a day when it's too hot to remain indo
covert motives imputed to me."

"Don't put yourself out. I only s
your time; and you ought to be oblige
you, as you can't see it for yourself. I
in a wood, Frances, or you would see w
hopes are fixed. Love's eyes are blind,

"What do you mean? Fixed where

"He is nothing to me, so I have
and have suspected the truth some
wonder, but it was her being here
place."

"Who? Who?" impatiently demanded
ing her foot.

"Susan Chase."

"Susan Chase?" repeated Miss Maitland.
she to do with Mr. Leicester?"

"Nothing—as yet. But I think it
like each other."

Frances Maitland turned away her
know this?"

"I was speaking to Susan one d
known Mr. Leicester in Barbadoes,
and red, as she had never grow
of Mr. Ca gie. It set me wonder
them sinc , and I feel sure he likes
liar tone in his voice when he speak
in his manner, which he gives to no
with her often. He makes his hea
general visiting, but he can go there
evenings. You have been wasting y

"She can't expect to marry afte

Carnagie," spoke Frances, in a fury—"especially Mr. Leicester. The idea of her taking in a clergyman!"

"That's past and gone. The Carnagie affair need be no impediment to her marrying another. I don't see that it need."

"Don't you?" was the sulky answer. "Then I do."

Bessy Ashley laughed.

"When Susan was engaged to him for years, was wild after him! After their wedding-day being fixed twice over, once before he went to Barbadoes, and three years afterwards, when he returned from it, and she loving him all that time and pining after him! You call that no impediment," muttered Frances Maitland. "Then I do."

[illegible] rather would you, if you were not [illegible] Miss Ashley.

[illegible] had turned Frances Maitland's blood [illegible] Susan Chase to win the prize for which she [illegible] striving! Not if she could prevent it. She sat [illegible] Ashley left her, nourishing her jealousy, [illegible] resentment, working herself into a positive

[illegible] Leicester was discerned crossing the corner [illegible] rose and met him, and then turned to pursue [illegible] by his side.

"It is a hot day," he observed.

"So hot that I hoped to find a little coolness strolling about under these shady trees," replied Frances, whose heart was beating wildly, and whose colour went and came. She was just in the mood to let her tongue commit itself, if she were not careful.

"I have come from the cottages," said Mr. Leicester. "The poor people have been pleased to tell me they shall be sorry to lose me."

"I dare say they will be. Our rector does not trouble

himself about cottage people. But you are not going yet, Mr. Leicester?"

"I came for six months, and have been here five."

"But—was there not some hope given to us that you might remain longer?" cried Frances, looking at him, and speaking quickly. "We heard so."

"The rector wrote to propose it, and the bishop would have been agreeable. Th[illegible] heard."

"Yes. Will you not rem[illegible]?"

He looked at her in turn, and smiled. "I cannot if I would; though I did not know that until this morning. The post brought me the welcome news that I have been appointed to a living, and I must take possession of it as soon as I can be released fr[illegible]."

Frances Maitland's heart [illegible] he left without speaking, there would [illegible] hopes for ever.

"What shall we all do without you?" [illegible]ingly.

"Nay; what shall I do without [illegible]? will be the real question." But he only spoke [illegible] and Frances knew it.

"What will Susan Chase do witho[illegible]ent —" Frances, unable longer to repress her bitter jealousy. "Report says that she will especially miss Mr. Leicester."

"Report is very kind to say anything so flattering," was his reply; and Frances saw the hot flush mount to his brow.

"And that Mr. Leicester will miss Miss Chase. Is it so?" she cried, with all the vehemence of her ill-regulated nature. But she was beside herself that day.

"Miss Maitland must pardon me. I do not see that I need satisfy gossip on the score of my private affairs."

"You cannot have serious thoughts of Susan Chase," she continued, in agitation; "or, if you have, you do not know her previous history."

"What is her previous history?" demanded Mr. Leicester, surprised into putting the hasty question.

"Susan's love was wasted long ago; she has none left to bestow upon you. Wasted on Lieutenant Carnagie."

"On Lieutenant Carnagie!" uttered the astonished Mr. Leicester. "Her sister's husband?"

"She loved him passionately for years. She was engaged to him, and their wedding-day was fixed. And at the last he left her, and chose her sister. A woman who has been betrothed in that way, and who has no love left, is not a suitable object for your affection, Mr. Leicester."

He was evidently absorbed in the story.

"She could not forget him even when he was Emma's husband. She followed them to Barbadoes. When Mrs. Carnagie returned to England she remained there with him, in his house. What do you suppose kept her from returning with her sister but her unconquerable love for him? Do you hear it, sir? She allowed Emma to sail without her, and remained behind with Mr. Carnagie. 'Tush!' was the scornful epithet, and very scornfully was it spoken, "Susan Chase is no fitting wife for the Reverend Mr. [illegible] brother."

Frances Maitland had overshot her mark: many do, when urged on by ill-nature: and Mr. Leicester's countenance brightened, and a half-smile arose to it.

"I do not wish to enter into Miss Chase's affairs with you, Miss Maitland, for I have not her permission to do so; but I must set you right upon one great point. The cause of her not accompanying her sister to England was not undue affection for Mr. Carnagie."

"Oh, indeed! You think so?"

"I know it, and can certify to it. Circumstances over which she had no control compelled Miss Chase to remain in Barbadoes; but she remained there under the protection

of my sister, Mrs. Freeman, and our house was afterwards her temporary home until she sailed."

"Are you determined not to believe what I tell you of Mr. Carnagie?" panted Frances.

"I cannot dispute your word that Miss Chase may have been engaged to Mr. Carnagie, but it would be impossible for me to believe anything to her real prejudice. She is a single-hearted, pure-minded woman, and I speak from intimate observation of her conduct."

Furious anger, jealous resentment, rushed into the heart of Frances Maitland; scarlet mortification was shown on her face. "Perhaps you wish to avow that you love her?" she intemperately uttered.

"That is an avowal a man rarely makes to a third person," was Mr. Leicester's answer. "I can avow that my friendship for her is great, that I esteem her beyond any woman I ever met with, or probably ever shall meet."

"Then you are a blind idiot!" shrieked Frances; and she tore away from him, at a right angle, over the hot grass.

"And now for Susan," thought Mr. Leicester, after he had sufficiently digested his companion's frantic proceedings. "The sooner I speak the better."

He did not see Susan until evening. When he entered she was alone.

"Is your sister out?" he inquired.

"No," replied Susan. "She is not very well and has gone to her room for the night. She suffers very much from heat, and this hot day has completely overpowered her."

The fact was, poor Ursula Chase, tall and very stout, did suffer terribly in hot weather. So she was in the habit, on intensely hot days, of retiring early to her chamber and courting the evening breeze at the open window in the airy costume of a dressing-gown.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Mr. Leicester.

"No."

"I wonder at that, for news spreads fast in this vicinity and I mentioned it this morning."

"What is it?" asked Susan.

"That I have had a living presented to me."

"Indeed! Then you will be leaving this."

"At the month's end. I wonder whether any one will regret me?"

"Oh yes," involuntarily answered Susan. "Many will," she hastened to add.

"Susan," he said, in a lower tone, as he advanced close to her and took her hand, "must I go alone?"

She strove to take it from him, but he would not let her. "Has not the time come when I may speak again?" he whispered. "Susan, we are both leading lonely lives. Why should it be so? Had I come here and found you with any object, or probable object, of attachment, I should have abided by the old refusal and never more have recurred to it. But it is not so, for you remain alone in the world. There have been times lately—may I speak out freely?" he broke off to ask, "frankly, as if the undisguised heart spoke, and not the lips?"

"Yes, yes," she answered.

"Then I have at times fancied you were inclined to regret that refusal: that you were beginning to esteem me more than you did when you pronounced it."

"I could not esteem you more than I did then, Mr. Leicester," she said, in gentle tones.

'Well—esteem is too cold a word, but—I did not dare to make it warmer. The joy that hope has brought to me is great; too great to be crushed now. Oh, Susan, you must listen to me! think how long I have loved you! What caused me to leave Barbadoes? The thought of you,

quite as much as my breaking health. What made me seek employment in this locality? The hope of being reunited to you."

Now, the truth was, if Susan did not repent her former rejection of Mr. Leicester immediately on its being given, she had done so very soon afterwards. That is, she repented having put a barrier to her friendship and intimacy with him. During the voyage home she had had leisure to reflect on his estimable qualities, his welcome society, his noble conduct to herself; and he gradually became the one bright spot in the sad Barbadoes reminiscence. During her more recent intercourse with him, she had learnt to love him; not, however, as she had once loved another. *That* could never be again for Susan Chase: it never is, for any one.

She stood closer to the window, pressed her forehead on its frame, and spoke in subdued tones.

"There are circumstances in my past life, which, if known to you, would probably forbid you to think of me as you are doing. Before I relate them to you, I must premise that all you have said may be as retracted. I shall understand it as such. No, Mr. Leicester"—for he sought to take her hand again—"listen first."

"When I was eighteen, I became engaged to a young officer; our marriage was arranged, and I was to accompany him abroad. My mother's death prevented it, and he sailed without me. We corresponded for more than three years, and then he returned to fulfil his engagement. It was Lieutenant Carnagie."

Susan stopped, but Mr. Leicester made no comment.

"He returned to marry me; but, ere the wedding day, I found that his love for me had changed into a love for my youngest sister—a strong, uncontrollable passion, as it appeared, and she shared it. I sacrificed my own feelings, released him, and they were married."

"Go on, Susan."

"From that moment I strove to drive him from my heart: it was a hard and bitter task, but I succeeded tolerably well: and when Emma wrote that she was suffering in health, miserable, and had a presentiment of dying in her approaching illness, I thought it my duty to go out to Barbadoes to her. Ursula would not do so. There I met you, Mr. Leicester."

"And your sister requited your kindness by quitting you in the manner she did!"

"Yes. You can understand, now, why I felt it so undesirable to be left under the roof of Mr. Carnagie. Not," added Susan, turning her truthful eyes upon him, "that any trace of former feeling remained in my heart. Oh no, that had been completely eradicated: but I felt my position an unpleasant one."

"It was so."

"And it proved so. One day after I had recovered from my former illness—I wish to tell you all, Mr. Leicester—Lieutenant Carnagie so far forgot himself as to speak of our former love: he urged me to promise that it should be renewed after the diet your um my sister was obtained. I was shocked and dy ought tnd I told him that I would far rather marry be cured mute on his estate than I would marry him. He left me in a passion, and you can close upon it. It was then you—spoke to me."

"Ay, ay."

"But I answered you very differently from the way in which I answered him, though the substance was the same," she said, glancing brightly up. "I was thankful to you, Mr. Leicester, gratified by your good opinion of me: and, in one sense, regretted so to answer you, for I had begun to value your friendship. I removed to your house the same afternoon."

"And I went up the country, on an improvised mission, to rid you of my company. The time will come yet, Susan, when we shall beguile our home evenings by talking over these old days."

This remark recalled Susan. "When Mr. Carnagie was in England last year, he came here. What do you think for? To renew his prayer, that I would still become Mrs. Carnagie. I quitted his presence, and sent Ursula to answer him. She did it. That is all I have to tell you, Mr. Leicester."

"And why have you told it me, Susan?"

"It was right that you should know it. And because, knowing it, you may not think of me as you did before."

"No, I do not; I think of you more highly. I repeat, Susan, I cannot see why you have told me this. Why should your having been engaged to Mr. Carnagie render you less eligible to become my wife?"

"Because my whole heart's love was given to him," she murmured. "Because, loving him as I did, ardently, enduringly, I can never love another. I esteem you, Mr. Leicester—far more than I ever esteemed him; I like you better than I like any one; but probably, than I ever shall like any one, even if we became engaged again after this night. I feel a pride in your regard, and I waste. I long for your society; in the daytime I wish the hours would more quickly pass on to evening, which may bring you; and, once in your presence, I am at rest, and look for nothing beyond it. Yet, for all this, I do not *love* you; my love passed from me with Charles Carnagie."

Mr. Leicester drew her face from the window, drew it towards him between his hands, and gazed on it. "What more can I desire?" he asked. "My dearest, I will promise you one thing—never to be jealous of the memory of Lieutenant Carnagie."

"You are willing [illegible] I am, with my worn-out heart?"

"Ay, Susan! take you and be thankful."

"Then," she whispered, leaning forward to hide her tearful face on his breast, "hear me also promise that I will be to you a good and faithful wife. You shall never have cause to regret that my early love was given to another."

"Susan, I must pay myself for that old refusal."

"As you please."

"Frances," cried Bessy Ashley, dancing into the presence of Frances Maitland, some days later, "I am going to be a bridesmaid to somebody. You are going to be asked to be another. Ursula Chase is to be the third."

"Who is going to be married?"

"Ah! Who! I am right, after all. It is to be directly, before the summer's over."

"Can't you speak out? Who is it?

"Susan Chase and Mr. Leicester."

"It's not true," said Frances, turning fifty colours.

"If it's not true, may I never be a bride myself," uttered Bessy. "Just put your nonsense, and behave to them as a decent young lady ought to behave. It *will be*: and you know what can't be cured must be endured."

Frances Maitland did pocket it, and was one of Susan Chase's bridesmaids on her wedding-day.

And Susan saw that destiny had been kinder to her than she would have been to herself; for she knew that, as the wife of Charles Carnagie, her heart would have sought in vain for the *home* it had now found in Mr. Leicester.

THE PREBENDARY'S DAUGHTER.

THE PREBENDARY'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

In a rural part of a well-known county of England, one boasting a cathedral-town for its chief city, which city we will call Closeford, there stands a red-brick building, hideous as Buckingham Palace in its style of architecture, and almost rivalling it in size. It seemed to have been built for strength, certainly not for ornament; and the traveller, as he gazes at its staring wings, its small windows, for the most part protected by upright iron bars, and then sees the luxuriant, well-kept acres of pleasure-grounds that surround it, halts on his road and inquires what the place can be.

"The Lunatic Asylum."

One traveller, in riding past it many years ago, received this reply to his question, and upon hazarding further remarks, found he had unconsciously addressed himself to one of the resident surgeons. He learnt that the new-fashioned system of rational and gentle treatment was pursued in it; and the conversation that ensued ended in his being invited to go over the establishment. It was an invitation that was gladly accepted; for, somewhat singular

to say, the business which had called him down from his own metropolitan home had reference to the affairs of one living in the not very distant county-town, who had recently shown symptoms of aberration of intellect. The surgeon called a man to put the stranger's horse in the stables, and they went in together.

The results of the system appeared to be eminently satisfactory, so far as a cursory visitor who was not a medical man could judge. Men and women, each in their separate departments, walked about, unrestrained, conversing cheerfully with each other, and passing the time rationally. A few were reading, several of the ladies working, one was trying over a piece of new music, her touch on the piano exquisitely sympathetic, and many were busy in the garden, over the flower beds. All were in reality under strict watch, but it was a watch they suspected not.

In an apartment on the ground floor, an ornamental flower-basket, heaped up with flowers recently gathered, stood on the table, and a young lady was making them into a wreath. A slight, graceful girl, dressed in white. As the two gentlemen entered, she rose from her seat and held out the wreath towards the doctor with a beaming smile. "It is nearly finished."

The stranger took off his hat and bowed. He presumed he was in the presence of a daughter of the principal of the asylum, or possibly a child of the gentleman then with him. The medical man carelessly took the wreath in his hand.

"I don't think you have well assorted the flowers, Maria," he observed. "Here are a pink, rose and carnation next each other, and the colours do not harmonize. I should put jessamine between them, or some of this clematis; anything white, by way of contrast."

She acted upon his advice, the stranger meanwhile

admiring her excessive beauty. He had rarely seen it equalled. Her features were refined, delicate and very fair, her hair light and curling, and there was a sweet, earnest expression in her blue eyes.

"Is that better?" she said; and the surgeon nodded.

"Do you like it?" she asked, holding out the garland towards the stranger. "It is not quite finished. I have still a little more to do to it."

"The flowers are lovely," was his reply, "and to my thinking well assorted. You are doing this for some one of your unfortunate inmates?"

Scarcely had the words left his lips when the surgeon turned hastily to him with a look of caution. But the young lady was quick as he, and spoke, her voice sunk almost to whisper.

"It is for my bridal. But you must not tell. They are gone for the orange-blossoms. I am ready, you see," touching her white dress, "all but the veil and flowers."

"Good mercy!" uttered the stranger, involuntarily; "*she* a victim! So lovely—and apparently so sensible!"

The doctor turned to leave the room, motioning his visitor before him. He looked back as he reached the door.

"Get on with your task, Maria," he observed. "I shall be here again presently. Why, you were deceived!" he said to the stranger, as he closed the door.

"Completely. I thought it was some young lady belonging to the authorities of the establishment. She spoke so rationally; and there was no madness in the expression of her eye. What can have brought her here, so young and exquisitely beautiful?"

"The same cause that mostly brings others of her sex, when they come in their early youth. An affair of the heart, as it is called. Her marriage was suddenly broken off, and she lost her reason. It was a deplorable thing."

"Is she incurable?"

"I fear so. But time, in these cases, will occasionally work marvels. She is from this neighbourhood: her father a clergyman, Dr. Remar."

"Dr. Remar!" repeated the stranger. "I heard a gentleman of that name preach last Sunday in the cathedral at Closeford, a Dr. or Mr. Remar. A tall, thin, pale man, but peculiar in his looks. His hair, quite white, though he did not look old, was worn rather long."

"Yes, that's her father. He has a stall in the cathedral: is in residence, probably, just now. When this affair happened, more than two years ago, his hair was as brown as mine. He has recently lost his wife. Poor things! Maria was their only child."

"But the simple breaking off of a marriage," urged the stranger, "seems scarcely sufficient to deprive a person of reason. The circumstances attending it must have been [redacted]e common order."

[redacted]elieve they were so. I don't know the exact par- [redacted] for the reports that went abroad at the time were [redacted]radictory to be relied upon. Some exposure took [redacted]e day before that fixed for the wedding: certain details of the gentleman's former life came out, I fancy, which were not to his credit. He was a clergyman, too."

The stranger's time was up. He thanked his companion for his courtesy, mounted his horse and rode off, his thoughts dwelling, not so much upon the "system" he had gone in to witness in its working, as upon that unfortunate girl and her brilliant loveliness. And again he marvelled what causes could have been sufficiently powerful to place her there.

Should the reader wish to know the same, he can now learn the particulars which the surgeon could not give. They are no secret to many living in the locality.

CHAPTER II.

ONE afternoon Mrs. Glynn and a gentleman were seated in one of the rooms of a handsome, though not large, house in Norfolk. The land around was productive, well kept and well cultivated; and the long meadow grass, and the healthy ripening corn, spoke to the eye and heart of plenty. It was no ancestral property, this, descended unentailed from father to son, but a small estate, which the gentleman sitting there had recently purchased. The room opened to the lawn by French windows, as they are called, when there came dashing to one of these a child of six years old, followed by a maid-servant holding a bonnet in her hand, both looking red and flurried.

"Lavinia!" exclaimed the mother, "I thought you were already gone. Good Heavens! she is crying! What is the matter?"

Up rose Mr. Glynn, himself and his nerves shaking at sight of the tears: as the foolishly-fond parent of many another child has risen up before him. The nurse attempted to explain, but the young lady stamped her feet on the floor, and talked more loudly than all.

She was a pretty child, though just now she looked like a pretty little fury, her face crimson and her keen black eyes flashing.

"What have you done to her, nurse?" demanded Mrs. Glynn.

"I have done nothing to her, ma'am. I have not spoken a cross word, or laid a finger on her. While I was getting her ready, she suddenly demanded to have her best things put on, and because I did not [illegible] flew into one of her passions. Look at her frock," said the stranger, with both the strings torn off; and if I had not [illegible] each last Sunday in order she would have ripped it off."

"I *will* have my own way," interrupted the young damsel, best looks. His hair, quite white, was worn rather long." [illegible] maid's legs, "How dare [illegible] her father. He has a stall in the [illegible]ers."

"These oft probated scenes are most lamentable," bewailed Mr. Glynn, his usually quiet tones querulous with agitation. "I cannot think, nurse, but you must be in fault. You have not, perhaps, the knack of managing little ones. I don't hear of other people's children being thrown into these distressing passions."

"I have repeatedly told you, nurse, that I cannot and will not have this," broke in Mrs. Glynn, impetuously. "You must keep her calm, at any sacrifice. You know what the doctors say, that she is one of the most excitable children living. She will be laid upon a sick bed, one of these days, through your injudicious contradiction, and her health ruined."

"I have no objection to her putting on her best things," retorted the servant, rather sharply, "but I know the state they will be in for Sunday, if she does. She trails along every dirty place she can find, and gets into the ponds, and tears through hedges, and it's beyond the power of any mortal man or woman to prevent her."

"Lavinia, my darling," cried Mrs. Glynn, with some silent suspicion that the nurse's words might prove true, and were so, "this frock is a very nice one—quite as pretty as your new silk."

"It's a nasty frock! It's an ugly frock!" shrieked the

young lady, louder than ever, as she commenced a frantic dance about the room. "I'll tear it to pieces if you make me wear it! I want my best frock, and my new hat."

"My poor child! my sweet Lavinia!" uttered the dismayed father, "don't excite yourself in this fearful way. Good Heavens! Mrs. Glynn, the child will have brain fever! Why don't you give her what she wants?"

"Go with nurse, my precious, and have everything you want," implored Mrs. Glynn. "It is all her fault; she has no business to contradict you."

So the young lady brought her dance and her sobs to a standstill, and flew out of the room, followed by the attendant.

"It is all that servant's fault!" ejaculated Mr. Glynn.

"Of course it is," assented his wife. "When the child's properly managed, she is a perfect little angel."

A very nice angel indeed!

"Well?" exclaimed a fellow-servant, looking out of the kitchen, as the nurse and the little tyrant passed the door.

"The same as usual," cried the nurse, in an aside answer. "She has got her will, and I am to change her clothes. But [illegible]; every time that master and mistress give in to her in this blind way, it is a nail in their own coffins. Mind if I don't tell you true!"

"I know I'd cure her, if she was a child of mine," was the muttered answer. "I'd put her under the pump, when her fiery fits came on, and pump on her till she was cool."

Now this scene really occurred, word for word, and similar ones had been occurring ever since the child's infancy. Some will be inclined to ask, Is it possible that any parents can be found so culpably foolish? It is not only possible but certain, that the parents of her who is here called Lavinia Glynn were so; and there are such still in the world.

The child was naturally of strong passions; her love, her hatred, her generosity, her vindictiveness, all were in extremes; and she had an inordinate share of self-will, what we are apt to term "obstinacy." This should be checked in all children, but especially in one like Lavinia Glynn; should have been constantly checked from her earliest youth. Instead of which, it was fostered by every possible means.

By the time she was a few years older, the scenes of passion and tears had ceased, for Lavinia carried her wishes without them; and obedience to her every whim was become so much a matter of custom with her parents, that resistance was never thought of.

It was attempted, however, once. Mr. and Mrs. Glynn had gone to London for medical advice for the former, who was always ailing, and were staying at a private hotel in Jermyn Street: Lavinia, who was then about fourteen, of course went with them, for they would as soon think of trying to fly as of stirring without her. It happened to be Epsom race week; and, to their astonishment and perplexity, Miss Lavinia announced her intention of "going down to the Derby" in the company of some people with whom she had picked up a speaking acquaintanceship at the same hotel. Mr. Glynn exhausted all his persuasion ineffectually, and finally told her she should not go.

Should not—to Lavinia? He might as well have told the tide not to flow on, as Canute once did. She flew out with a little of her old violence, and set him at defiance, declaring that neither he nor any one else should oppose her will. So, poor, weak man, he made a compromise; that is, he tried to make it, and proposed to procure a carriage and take her down to Epsom himself. But that did not do for Miss Lavinia; she should and she would go with those who had invited her; and the next morning Mr. and

Mrs. Glynn had the satisfaction of seeing her get into the crowded hired barouche of these strangers.

Oh the fruit! the fruit!—the fruit that an education, such as this, must bring forth on a child! Mr. and Mrs. Glynn lived to reap it. Better that God had taken her in her sinless infancy.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORM.

The storm was nearly over and the sun, bursting forth from the verge of the horizon, for it was near its setting, caused the drops to glisten on the trees, and lighted up the hills in the distance. The clouds were disappearing from the sky, leaving its deep blue visible, and giving promise, now, of a calm night, whilst the sweet odour arising from the heated earth was inexpressibly refreshing. An hour before the scene had been different. Then, the clouds were lowering ominously, faint peals of thunder, quickly growing nearer, resounded in the still air, and heavy drops of rain had commenced their descent on the trees. They fell on the bare head of a gentleman, striding impatiently to and fro: he had removed his hat, for it pressed his brow heavily in the sultry heat, and he pushed back his waving hair, wishing for a breath of wind to cool his brow. He was young, probably three or four and twenty, of a courtly presence, sufficiently attractive in feature and form, but the lines of his face spoke of dissipation, and of a will that knew little bridling. It was a secluded spot this, to which he confined his steps. Years ago it had been but a young plantation, on the grounds of the nobleman whose estate lay around, but the trees had towered up in their might and strength, until now they rivalled those of many an older forest. A path lay through the wood, and striking

from the midst of this path on the right you came upon a small, grassy opening in which was a sort of bower formed by the trees, where rude seats had been placed. On the left of the wood lay the seashore, but it could not be seen from that spot. It was in this green opening, so dark and secluded that one penetrating to it might fancy himself miles from the haunts of men, that the young man was pacing, and an impatient exclamation at being kept waiting burst more than once from his lips. But now there advanced towards him, breaking from the dense trees, a form young and handsome, and the irritated expression left his face and he started eagerly forward. It was that of Lavinia Glynn.

But Lavinia Glynn grew up to womanhood. Look at her, reader: a fine girl, tall and graceful, with pale, statue-like features, impassioned in excitement, calm in repose: bands of raven hair shade her face, and in her jet-black eye there is a flashing light, a brilliancy rarely seen in women of these more northern climes.

With the increase of years had increased Mr. Glynn's ailments. He had latterly taken it into his head that Norfolk did not suit him; was too damp, or too dry, or too something. So he sold his property there, and took a house for six months in a remote seaside village in Sussex. And it was there Lavinia met with Mr. Durham.

Who was he, this young man? *She* knew not. She had encountered him soon after their arrival at the village, in one of her solitary walks on the beach. It may be that each was mutually struck with the attractions of the other: it may be that the loneliness of the place banished from their minds conventional forms and ceremonies, especially the common one of introduction: certain it is they got into conversation, neither quite remembering afterwards which had made the first advances towards it. This one

formal meeting had led to many others, and it was to lead to many more.

It is impossible to describe the sentiment with which Lavinia Glynn regarded Mr. Durham. They had now met every day for five or six weeks, ay, more than once in each day, and to designate the feeling which had grown up in her heart for him by the name of love would be to express it most inadequately. A more ungovernable passion never was indulged in: he had become to her all in all; she would have given up heaven at his bidding; father, mother, ties, kindred, all were to her now as nothing, compared with this attractive stranger, who had arisen to usurp every corner of her ill-regulated heart.

What could be expected of a girl brought up as Lavinia Glynn? That she would curb this extravagant passion, when she knew not whether he for whom it was entertained was worthy or not?—that she would at least restrain it within moderate bounds? How can you ask it? When a child, in infancy, is allowed to indulge its every fancy, ordinate and inordinate, in childhood left uncontrolled, in girlhood unrestrained, how, think you, will it fare with the stronger passions of riper years?

Mr. Durham had told her nothing about himself. He may have been a reserved man by nature, though that is not often a characteristic of youth, or he may have possessed some secret motive for not wishing her to know much of himself and his antecedents. All the information he imparted to her was, that his name was Durham, that his parents were dead, and that he was fresh from Cambridge University. What had brought him to this retired sea-coast village? she asked him one day. A love of roving was the reply. He had come to it one morning in holiday idleness, intending to remain a day, perhaps two, and then start off again; but—he saw *her*, and could not tear himself away.

Sufficient explanation for Lavinia, but perhaps certain creditors of the gentleman's could have given a different colouring to his sojourn there, had they been so fortunate as to learn the fact.

So their meetings had gone on unchecked, from the few first accidental ones on the seashore. There were scarcely any visitors staying in the village, ten or twelve at the most, and these were middle-aged invalids, devoted to themselves and to the recruiting of their own health. They had passed the age of romance, and it was nothing to them that a handsome girl and a stylish-looking man, both strangers, should appear to be striking up a flirtation; should come upon each other, on the sands, at all sorts of odd hours, and saunter carelessly away together; now, further up the beach, as if in pursuit of breeze and sea-shells; now, back to the fields; and now, far away towards the forest, out of sight and memory.

In one of their stolen walks they had come upon this recess in the wood, and, tired and heated, Lavinia had sat down in it. Ah! it was better there than in those public promenades, the wide sea-beach, the open fields, the broad wood-path; for Mr. Durham could hold in his that fair hand (which, by the way, was *not* fair, in the romantic acceptation of the term, for though it was delicate in colour, it had never been so in structure), and make love as much as he pleased, with little chance of being popped upon by any staring straggler. And to this spot their steps were by tacit agreement henceforth directed, Mr. Durham growing more devoted and Lavinia more passionately fond of him day by day. But take you care, Lavinia Glynn, that you go not once too often. It may be you know not the danger that may arise from these repeated solitary meetings, when you are alone with a careless, unprincipled man and the impetuosity of your own uncontrolled heart! It may

be you do not know the light in which a man of the world always looks upon one who can systematically deceive her parents and outrage the usages of custom to be in his society; the little respect he can continue to feel for her! It was an unfortunate thing that Mr. Glynn should have had, just at this time, a renewed attack of the disorder he came to cure. Some days he did not go out at all: others, only for a few minutes, leaning on his wife's arm. Lavinia, therefore, was at liberty to follow her own course. Occasionally, indeed, when her absences were unusually prolonged, Mrs. Glynn questioned her as to how they were spent. "Reading on the beach," or some such plausible excuse, was the ready reply; and it was never questioned. One person, however, knew of these frequent meetings with Mr. Durham. It was a woman-servant of Mrs. Glynn's, Dobson, a maid who had not lived with them very long, but who had wormed herself into Lavinia's confidence. She usually attended Lavinia in her walks—or was supposed to do so; and she entered into the spirit of this clandestine affair eagerly.

"My lovely Lavinia!" exclaimed Mr. Durham, as Miss Glynn came forwards from the trees, "I feared you would never come!"

"Oh, Arthur!" she uttered, "I thought I should have gone mad! I knew you were waiting for me, and I could not get away, for I was kept reading to my father. Had there been a fire in the room, I think I should have thrown the pamphlet into it."

"I imagined that the threatening storm had kept you," returned Mr. Durham. "It seems to be coming on quickly."

"*The storm?*" she thought. "If the clouds, parted, fire I would joyfully walk through all if it were to lead me to him!—My mother is not well this evening, and is tired," she said aloud, "and pain is so exacting."

Mr. Durham's remark about the storm seemed soon to be verified. The lightning had become more frequent, more vivid, the thunder was nearer, and the rain fell faster. He passed his arm round Lavinia, and drew her inside the bower for shelter, under its intertwined roof of leaves and branches. She did not sit down, but stood at the entrance, looking out. It may be questioned, however, if she saw or heard the signs of the increasing storm: certainly she did not heed them. She had no sight but for that form beside her, no thought but for that one idol. And had an angel's voice spoken and told her it was a worthless one, she would not have listened or cared.

So there they remained. Mr. Durham whispering all the insinuating deceit that man knows so well how to whisper, and Lavinia drinking it in: not as poison, which she ought to have done, but as the very sweetest incense ever offered up to woman. And the storm soon raged in all its fury and strength.

CHAPTER IV.

A STERN SUMMONS.

THE shades of night were gathering on the earth when Lavinia Glynn drew near to her home. It was a solitary house, standing just outside the village, surrounded by a productive garden: grass, flowers, fruit and vegetables, all grew together in that well-kept, agreeable disorder often observable in small country tenements. A privet hedge enclosed it on two sides, in which there was a gate. It was not the front entrance, but Lavinia approached it, went through, and was passing stealthily across the garden, towards the side-door of the house, when some one darted out, in a crouching posture, from some high shrubs, and seized her by the arm. Lavinia, albeit a young lady to whom "nerves" were unknown, gave a startled cry. Yet it was only Dobson.

"Where in the world have you been, Miss Lavinia?" was her hurried salutation. "There has been the greatest rumpus: missis and master—— What is the matter?" broke off the servant, as she noticed her young lady more particularly, her strange and hurried appearance.

"I am not well," replied Miss Glynn; "I—I hastened through the rain, and I—I suppose I fainted and fell. I am going straight to my room, and shall not come down again."

"You can't go up to your room till you have shown

yourself," interrupted Dobson, authoritatively; and it may here be mentioned that Miss Glynn's confidential familiarity with her servant caused the servant to be familiar with her—a natural sequence, and one that is sure to follow. "They have been sending all over the place, and I was forced to hide myself out here, or master would have seen me, for he has been dodging in and out like one possessed. I tell you what it is, Miss Lavinia, if you are going to remain out in this way, I can't undertake to cloak it with the pretence that you are out with me. I have been off my head with fright almost, stopping out here in the lightning and thunder."

"Has it thundered so much?" demanded Lavinia, vaguely.

"Have you been deaf or asleep?" asked the girl, looking at her keenly. "It was the thunder that so frightened master and missis: they thought we might be on the sands, in the thick of it. Frightfully loud it was, too!"

"Yes, yes," cried Lavinia, hastily; "I forgot. It has given me a headache, and I can think of nothing. I shall go and sleep it off. Call me as usual in the morning."

"But I tell you, you can't go till they have seen you," repeated the servant. "Missis has rung the bell twenty times, inquiring if we were come, and master's more nervous than he has been for months. I have heard it all from here. Hark, he's inquiring again now! Where's Mr. Durham?"

"Gone home, I suppose. I left him long ago. How do I know? What a fuss papa's making! Go in, Dobson; say we stopped on the beach, and that I am tired."

"The beach won't do," bluntly retorted the servant; "the butler went there, and came back and reported that there was not a soul all over it."

"Then make up a tale yourself," answered Lavinia, darting past the maid, "for I tell you I am not going to

be questioned to-night. Say the thunder frightened me, and I have gone to bed and can't be disturbed; say anything."

For a short time these clandestine meetings continued to go on, and the bower to be a witness to many a love-vow, destined to be broken, as love-vows for the most part are. Whilst they are in progress, let us give a word of explanation about one of the two parties to them.

A few years previously, Arthur Durham—by which appellation we will continue, for the present, to designate him, though in giving the name "Durham" to Lavinia Glynn, he had given one that was not his own - became a freshman at Cambridge. His mother had died in his boyhood, and he had recently lost his father, a clergyman. The property left to Arthur was very small—scarcely more than enough to prepare him for the Church, to which he was likewise destined; for his father, though enjoying an excellent benefice, was a free-living man, and spent in many ways where he might have saved. Before Arthur had been three months at the university he was deep in everything that he ought to have kept out of—bets, drink, rows, racing, billiards, suppers, headaches, and a whole catalogue of other evils, all helping him to become a parson in accordance with our system of education. Now Arthur Durham was a handsome gentlemanly young fellow, a fascinating companion, and stood high in university favour, not quite, perhaps, with the deans and proctors, but with all the "sets," high and low of his college. The consequence was that, instead of struggling resolutely out of the mud, which was likely to smother him, as a poor man, he dived deeper into it with every term, until at last the state of his affairs was obliged to be made known to his uncle, the brother of his late father, a rich man with an only son. Very wroth, and more shocked than wroth was this good

man, when he found that his nephew's substance had gone the way of all circulating metal, that he dared not walk about for fear of certain ominous taps on the shoulder, and that unless the more pressing claims on him were settled he could not show his face again at Cambridge. But he was not so bad an uncle, as uncles go, for though he bewailed and lectured, and lectured and bewailed, making Mr. Arthur, as he fondly hoped, repent to the very end of his heartstrings, he ended by paying all the debts and made his nephew a sufficient allowance to keep him for the remainder of his terms. So back went my gentleman with flying colours, and in another year was as deep in tradesmen's books as ever, and in others more pressing than university tradesmen's. Arthur Durham had not a bad heart, and by nature he was not profligate, but the prevalent dissipation at the university, the reckless society he mixed with there, drew him on, almost imperceptibly to himself. He did not like to approach his uncle a second time, and hence his sojourn at that obscure little watering-place; for it was necessary to be out of the way until something was done, though what that something would be was a puzzle to himself. He found the place excessively slow; his own account of it, in writing to a friend, was that he was "bored to death": perhaps that he did not quite leave it (and the world) for a better, was owing to his pursuit of Lavinia Glynn. But gallant amusements being quite "used-up" diversion at the university, Mr. Durham still found himself "bored" considerably, and one desperate day he took heart and pen, and wrote a letter to his uncle full of self-contrition, promises for the future, and prayers for assistance, all jumbled up together as strong as the dictionary could make them.

The answer came: a stern summons. Mr. Arthur was ordered to "come out of that disgraceful hiding" and

appear forthwith before his uncle. If he lost four-and-twenty hours in doing so, the old gentleman affirmed he would not see or help him. And he was one to keep his word.

"Whew!" whistled Arthur, when he received the letter, which arrived about ten days after the evening of the storm, "what will Lavinia say?"

What indeed! Mr. Durham met her as usual that day, and broke the news to her. But, hoping more effectually to prevent remonstrance on her part, he said the summons was from his college.

"Oh, but you may not go! you *must* not go!" uttered Lavinia, when the full import of the news broke upon her startled mind. "Arthur, you know you dare not go!"

"There is one thing I dare not do," he replied, "and that is, disobey the mandate. You are not aware of the power these college proctors exercise over us, Lavinia. I should be ruined for life if I refused to attend."

"You must refuse now," she impetuously reiterated; "you cannot leave me here alone. "I should die of grief."

"Lavinia, my dearest, disobedience is an impossibility, and go I must. But you have no need to let it thus affect you; for I tell you I shall be back the instant I can get liberty."

"And our marriage?" she whispered.

"I am as anxious about all these things as you can be," was Mr. Durham's reply. "Let me obey this summons, and I will see what arrangements I can make."

"Where am I to write to you—what address? I could not live now, in your absence, without writing and hearing daily."

Mr. Durham hesitated: he had told her he was going to Cambridge, and the reader knows he was not. Her question puzzled him.

"I will write and tell you," he said. "I don't know

what this confounded mandate may be for. The heads may be going to rusticate me; and I should not like your letters to fall into other hands. I will write, Lavinia."

"Oh, go not away!" she resumed imploringly. "Last night I dreamt that you went, and the time went on—on—on—and you never returned! The dream was so like reality, that I have thought of it all day long with a shudder. Oh, Arthur, go not away! Leave me not!"

He soothed her into temporary calmness, into an unwilling acquiescence, and so departed.

It was late in the evening of the following day when Arthur Durham presented himself before his uncle at his country residence. The old gentleman was pacing his library, a handsome room, well stored with books. He turned sharply round when Arthur entered.

"So, sir," he said, darting unceremoniously into the subject, without preface or compliments, "what has become of all your solemn promises of amendment that you made to me in this very room?"

"Sir," cried Arthur, "I am deeply ashamed not to have kept them."

"Can you advance one argument in defence of your disgraceful conduct?" he resumed sternly.

Arthur was silent: he knew that his uncle looked with no lenient eye upon the thoughtless follies of youth. Always a bookworm, always, even in boyhood, in delicate health, he had never himself yielded to their temptations, and could make no allowance for those who did. Marrying late in life a wife fond of retirement, he had secluded himself ever since on this his ancestral estate, bringing up his only surviving child, Durham (a family name: the reason, probably, of Mr. Arthur's assuming it when he was at fault for one), on a most strict, model plan. They don't always answer, though, let them be ever so model.

"I can only advance one excuse, sir," observed Arthur: "the almost irresistible temptations that beset us at the university."

"There are no temptations, none that may not be surmounted," retorted the elder gentleman, calmly. "To get into debt, or keep out of it, is entirely at a man's own option. Durham has been at Oxford twelve months, and he is not in debt. He has not lived up to his allowance, and he's younger than you by years."

Whatever may have been Arthur's faults, want of generous feeling was not amongst them, and he remained silent. But it was within his knowledge that his cousin Durham was already soaring a few kites in the air.

"Durham goes as a gentleman-commoner, with an ample income now, and a large fortune in prospective," he observed. "I am known to be a poor man, who will have to get on hereafter by my luck or my brains."

"If your last speech is intended by way of argument," resumed the uncle, "I don't see how it bears upon the case. I should say it tells against you."

It certainly did.

"A very pretty career is yours, to fit you for one of God's holy ministers! Pray, sir, which is deepest in your thoughts—how you shall best get out of debt, or into divinity?"

"Why, sir, the university is not supposed to fit us for—for—religion, and that sort of thing," replied Arthur, candidly. "I suppose that comes with the ordination—if it comes at all."

"You may well say 'if it comes at all!'" exclaimed the old man, pacing about in his restless manner. "It is the wretched training of our young divines that is helping to pull down the Establishment. Oh, you may laugh! You don't think it is coming down? I can tell you, sir, that

unless a sweeping reform takes place, on more points than one, in a century's time we shall all be dissenters. And the Reformed Church will be left to take care of itself—without its revenues, though," added the speaker, shrewdly.

"What an old croaker!" soliloquized Arthur.

"How is a minister of God prepared for his holy office? how are *you* being prepared?" he continued, wheeling round and facing his nephew. "You went to school, and there you were taught just as the other boys were taught, irrespective of future career: whether to be a soldier, a parson, a rake, no matter; the training was the same for all. Then you went to the university, and what d'you do there?"

"I only do as others do," deprecated Arthur.

"Just so; that's where it is. You learn to dress, and swindle poor duns, and feast and drink, with graver vices that I will not put you to shame by naming. A few years of this folly, each year growing worse than the last, and you present yourself to a bishop, he lays his hands on you, and you are turned out into the world to take care of other men's souls when you care nothing and know less about your own!"

"What a confounded old croaker!" thought Arthur again.

"Well, there the system is, and I can't mend it, but I know what it will do for England. The people are becoming enlightened, and, one by one, all abuses and anomalies will be swept away."

"Meanwhile, what am *I* to do, sir, to avoid being swept away?" broke in Arthur, coming to the point. "Will you forgive and assist me? I promise, on my honour, it shall be for the last time."

"It would go against my conscience to aid in making him one of these graceless ministers, were it not that they

are all alike," observed the old man, speaking rather in soliloquy than in answer. "How long is it before you can be ready to take orders?"

"About twelve months," was the reply.

"And in that twelve months, if I set you free now, you will be as deep in debt as ever."

"Sir, again I say I will pledge you my honour."

"Honour amongst university students goes for what it's worth, I expect. I have no faith in it."

"What am I to say, sir?"

"I think the less you say the better, after all you asserted once before. You are my brother's child, Arthur, and I perhaps ought to give you one more trial. Get back to college, hasten your studies there, and give me in the list of your debts."

"You are more generous than I deserve, sir—than I expected," exclaimed the young man, the tears rushing to his eyes.

"Get yourself made a parson as speedily as you can—and a choice specimen you'll make, to judge by these antecedents."

"No worse than the generality of them sir," replied Arthur Durham.

It would seem that Lavinia Glynn's dream had been prophetic, for Mr. Durham never returned. One letter came from him in the first week of his departure, which stated that he was leaving Cambridge for the house of a relative, and it was uncertain when he should return to the university; but he would write again shortly.

He never did write. And as the days, the weeks passed

on, and there were no tidings from him, no sign of his return, no proof even that he was still in existence, Lavinia's state of mind was terrible. None can describe the fierce, conflicting passions that waged war in it. She would wander and watch through the livelong day, now pacing fiercely in their old resorts, now haunting the post-office with inquiries for letters, till that edifice began to think her a troubled spirit, and now she would prostrate herself in that wide forest, in its dreary solitude, and call upon his name in her uncontrolled anguish, and cry out for him to come back to her. But he never came; he was only proving himself another of those faithless cavaliers, celebrated in the song of the "Baron of Mowbray," who love and ride away.

All that was all Lavinia Glynn's requital for her insane worship. Very bitter, no doubt, but very natural.

CHAPTER V.

AT ARNBROOK RECTORY.

A SUNNY country rectory. The windows of a small room open to a verdant lawn, where the autumn flowers were blooming in clusters, under the genial beams of the morning sun, and a well-spread breakfast-table drawn to the windows and waiting for its guests, presented a pleasant picture of English comfort.

The first to enter the room was a fair girl of winning loveliness, the only child of the house, and the more precious, perhaps, that two sisters had died in childhood. She came dancing in, her blue eyes sparkling, and the curls of her light hair waving. Her features were of a charming delicacy rarely seen, and her complexion was fair and bright. It was Maria Remar.

Dr. Remar came next, carrying his shovel hat. A tall, pale man, with those abstracted looks that one is apt to fancy characteristic of an intellectual clergyman, and a nervous restlessness of the hands. There was a considerable likeness between him and his daughter, but in complexion he was darker, his hair being of a fine brown. Mrs. Remar followed, and they sat down to breakfast.

The conversation turned chiefly upon one point: the approaching departure of Dr. Remar's curate. A painstaking, hard-working man, who had held the office under the three preceding rectors (those cathedral livings often

change hands), altogether for two-and-twenty years, and was now rewarded with a substantial benefice of £150 per annum. Dr. Remar was thinking how to replace him, and was running over in his head all the lower fry of clergy congregated in Closeford, the neighbouring cathedral town, when his man-servant entered with the letters.

Arnbrook Rectory and village were situated about seven miles from Closeford, and this morning post was from that place only: the London letters, when there were any, came some hours later in the day. Two letters and the county newspaper Andrew laid before his master. Dr. Remar put on his glasses—he was near-sighted by nature, not with age—and opened one of the letters.

The doctor caught a glimpse of its contents: he looked at the sides, he looked at the middle, he looked at the beginning, he looked at the signature; and then the doctor turned pale and red by turns, and finally looked at his daughter.

"Maria, here's an offer of marriage for you!"

If the doctor was perturbed, she was not; and the amused, all-unconscious glance she raised to her father proved that her heart was as yet untouched.

"The epistle"—(cough)—"is from my friend"—(cough, cough)—"what's the matter with my throat?" exclaimed the doctor; but the truth was, he was agitated. "Give me some more tea, Elizabeth—from my friend, Dr. Gore."

Maria laughed out unrestrainedly.

"Why, papa! I like Dr. Gore very well as a prebendary, as your friend; but he is too old for me to marry! He is older than you!"

"He's on the verge of fifty," observed the doctor. "Nevertheless, my dear, he makes you a very handsome offer, and proposes an ample settlement. And he is our sub-dean!"

"I wish people would leave Maria alone!" exclaimed

Mrs. Remar, struggling between tears and peevishness. "This is the second officious offer she has had. She is our only child; why should they want to take her away from us?"

"Dear mamma," whispered Maria, drawing her mother's hand within hers, "be not afraid. I would rather be with you and papa than with all the sub-deans in the Church."

"What answer am I to make, Maria?" asked Dr. Remar. "You had better read the letter."

"What you think best, papa: anything civil. But I could not like old Dr. Gore. The next time I see him, I fear I shall laugh in his face."

"You are too fond of laughing, Maria," rebuked the doctor. "You had better school yourself on that point, child."

Maria looked down, and compressed her lips, for she was on the verge of transgressing then. And the canon unsealed his other letter.

"Why, this is from the general post—oh, I see—re-directed on here from Closeford. Curacy vacant—title to orders—late father's friend—creditable examination! Well, that's fortunate, and will save me the trouble of looking out, when I am just now so busy with my notes to the 'Divine Commentary.'"

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Remar.

"It's from my old tutor at Cambridge, inquiring if I can give or procure a title to orders for a pupil of his, the son of a deceased friend. A clever young man, he writes, and has passed a good examination. It will be the very thing! He can come here for twelve months."

"Then you must change again at the end of that period, a second trouble," urged Mrs. Remar.

"Not certain. He may suit my views, and remain on for good. Glad to do it, perhaps. I don't suppose he is a young fellow with any interest: an orphan, Wilson says."

"What is the name?" asked Mrs. Remar.

"Name? I do not know whether the letter mentions the name. Oh yes, 'Chase.' Arthur Chase. Well, I shall answer this communication at once," concluded Dr. Remar, gathering up his papers and rising from the breakfast-table.

"And the other one also, papa, if you please," said Maria.

"The other one?" cried Dr. Remar, who, like most spirits who live within themselves, was remarkably forgetful and abstracted. "Oh, true! I am sure I scarcely know what to say. I fear the sub-dean will think you unpardonably insensible to merit, Maria."

"I dare say he will, papa."

Dr. Remar held a prebend's stall in Closeford Cathedral; and, following prebendal custom, prepared in November to remove thither, with his family, for the audit season. Most prebendaries have a house contiguous to their cathedral, but Dr. Remar, with the exception of the month of November, during which the audit is held, and the four or five weeks he was in residence, generally made his home at Arnbrook Rectory.

All prebendaries are supposed to lie under an obligation to reside in the immediate vicinity of their cathedral during four or five weeks in each year. During this period they ought to attend prayers in the cathedral once each day (not taking any portion of the duty), and to preach the sermon on Sunday mornings—that is, four or five sermons in all—but this latter duty they may delegate to a minor canon. No very arduous task, reader. I think you and I would hold a stall in a cathedral if we could get it. And for which they receive—I don't like to say how much, for fear somebody should bring an action against me for libel.

Before Dr. Remar departed for Closeford, the new curate, Arthur Chase, arrived at the Rectory. The *Reverend* Arthur Chase he was now, for the Bishop of Closeford had obligingly put him through the necessary preliminaries. It was evening when he arrived. He had taken the half-past five o'clock coach from Closeford, and was set down about half-past six at the rectory-gate. Dr. and Mrs. Remar had strolled out after their dinner, but Maria was in the garden, and saw him get off the coach. The young clergyman came up to her, and introduced himself.

What most struck Maria was the remarkable contrast he presented to their late curate. The Reverend Joseph Hall was a meek, retiring man of six or seven and forty years, very humble, very silent, especially when in the presence of his rector's family, and in person very plain. Maria never remembered him to have voluntarily addressed her but once, and then he had called her "Miss." But look at the one now before her! A tall, elegant man, of great personal attractions, whose bearing and manners were high-bred and refined, who conversed with her in a tone of the most perfect equality, who made himself, at once, the easy, agreeable companion, who was evidently quite as much at home in good society as she was, and who—in short, to sum the matter up, who won her good will, off-hand.

Not only Maria's. The doctor and Mrs. Remar, the parishioners, the farmer and his family whose house was to be his home, for he had taken possession of the lodgings of the late curate, all were wonderfully taken with the young minister. And when Sunday came and he preached a sermon, which, whether it was his own or not, was of persuasive eloquence, the opulent farmers openly congratulated the rector on his choice, and the latter imparted his satisfaction to his wife and daughter. But in this general congratulation none remembered that a persuasive voice and

eloquent tongue may belong to a bad man as well as a good one—minister of the Gospel though he be.

"I shall ask him to come up and dine with us, after the second service," said the rector to his wife, in the plenitude of his satisfaction.

Perhaps the rector had better have left it alone. Though how did he foresee, at that early stage, that the less Mr. Chase and Maria saw of each other, the better? He could not look into their hearts, and read the favourable impression which had been mutually made.

Not until next Saturday did Dr. Remar and his family leave for Closeford. But in that seven days Maria had been more in the society of the new curate than she had been in that of the old one in all her life. Not a day but he had spent part of it at the rectory, scarcely a day but he joined Mrs. Remar and Maria in their walks, the doctor being buried as usual in his study, up to his eyes in ink and manuscripts. Now he was chattering to them whilst they worked, all sorts of pleasant anecdotes, tales of his college-life—of course he was careful what he said here—reminiscences of his early home, another country-rectory, and of his lost but never-to-be-forgotten mother; unreserved accounts of his uncle, and his fine property, and all he had done for him, for Mr. Chase made no secret that his own had been a thoughtless career, speaking of it in terms of contrition. Now he would tie up flowers, and pluck the dying leaves off Mrs. Remar's plants; now he would come, laughing, up to the rectory, with a great quart stone bottle, from good Dame Giles, for some more "stuff for her rheumatiz," as the late curate had been wont to do, only that *he*, in his shy modesty, would seek the supply from the housekeeper, not from Mrs. Remar: now he would stroll forth in the sunny afternoon with Mrs. Remar and Maria, to see and be introduced to some other house-confined dame; and in

the evening he would be there making the tea-table pleasant, and arousing the studious, abstracted rector to cheerfulness. Altogether, when, on the Saturday, Maria sat in the carriage on her way to Closeford, she may be pardoned for letting her thoughts run wild on the new and attractive companion they were leaving behind. They were to return to the rectory for Christmas, to remain; and Maria already wished the time had come.

CHAPTER VI.

DR. REMAR'S DECISION.

It came: and it went. The clear, frosty month of January, the warmer but less fine February came in, each in its turn, and March arrived all blustering, but giving fair promise of a lovely spring. How fared it by this time at Arnbrook Rectory? Reader, you have little need to ask. How is it likely to fare when two young and as yet unoccupied hearts are thrown into daily contact with each other? From the very first hour of their meeting, that twilight evening when she had seen him get off the coach at the rectory-gate, the ill-fated young lady's interest had been strongly excited towards Mr. Chase; and now that for some months they had been brought into companionship, he ever by her side in the plenitude of his manifold attractions, that interest had deepened into love. Not the every-day sentiment which is usually designated by the name, but the deep, all-absorbing passion that sets its stamp upon all the future life. The elements of powerful passion were in Maria Remar's nature, and though they had hitherto lain in repose, subdued to calmness by education and religion, they arose not the less potent now that their chords were touched.

And the Reverend Arthur Chase? Dissipated as his college-life had been, reckless as its course, heedless as he had remained as to who suffered so that he obtained the gratification of the hour, whatever its nature might be, will

it be believed that a chaste, pure love had now for the first time taken possession of his heart? Yet it had. He looked on Maria Remar, and prayed that he might become worthy of her. He glanced back at his former follies with loathing and repentance; he sincerely hoped from henceforth to lead a good life: was it that the "religion" had "come" with his ordination, as he had once suggested to his uncle? I don't know; but certain it is that he had now become aware of the deep responsibility he had then assumed in the sight of God. No man could more earnestly hope and desire to fulfil his duties for the future. To be a faithful and sincere Christian minister, and to some time call Maria Remar his wife, were now the aspirations of Arthur Chase. No plain declaration of love had passed from Mr. Chase to Maria, yet the dear feelings of each were betrayed in a thousand ways, quite as certainly as words could speak them. But, Heaven bless Mr. Chase's innocence! wideawake as he was in the ways of the world, he little knew the nice distinctions of a cathedral town, or he never could have admitted a hope that anything so obscure as a curate without definite prospects—and very definite ones, too!—might dare to aspire to the daughter of Canon Remar.

A few weeks more, it was in April, and Dr. and Mrs. Remar's optics were rent open. It may be a wonder to most people that they had remained shut so long: but, that one in the position of Mr. Chase could presume to think of Maria, never entered into the exclusive ideas of Dr. and Mrs. Remar. To them he was but the lowly curate; a clergyman, it is true, but one cast in quite another sphere; the successor to the shy, humble drudge, who would have been as likely to raise his eyes to royalty for a wife as to the offshoot of a prebendary. If you think these distinctions were not held and recognized amongst certain of the clergy, at the time of which I am writing, you are extremely inexperienced

in what regarded them, and I am now telling you no tale of fiction.

The way in which it came out was very shocking: everybody said so. The doctor had an attack of something—he said gout, and his wife said rheumatism—but, whatever it was, it caused him to keep his bedroom, and diet himself, for he was a nervous man in illness. One evening Mrs. Remar, who had been sitting with him, came creeping down to the breakfast-room for her knitting, which she only worked at by twilight. She had on list shoes, not to disturb the invalid, who could not bear the least noise when he thought himself ill, and, pushing open the room door, quietly entered. Horror of horrors! there stood Mr. Chase and Maria just outside the window; his arm was round her waist, his hand clasped hers, and he was whispering persuasively to her in the fading light, their attitude being unmistakably that of lovers. Of course it was very dreadful—we all know it, that is, if we are elderly—and Mrs. Remar stood transfixed: had she witnessed a bear's paw round her daughter's waist, she would not have been quite so much shocked. She uttered an involuntary exclamation, which caused Mr. Chase to start and release Maria; and the red blood rushed over his handsome face.

He could do nothing else than speak out; which he did at once; all his love; all his hopes; how tenderly he was attached to Maria, how fervently he trusted some day to make her his wife. Mrs. Remar would have preferred, of the two, to hear he was attached to *her*. She was too angry, too dismayed, to reply. Of impassible general temperament, she was capable, like Maria, of being aroused to great excitement, and she flew upstairs to Dr. Remar.

The doctor, for some time, could not make out what was the disturbance, for with her frantic lamentations and hysterical sobs, his wife was partly unintelligible. But

when he did comprehend the matter, he tumbled out of bed with as little ceremony as any doctor of divinity ever tumbled out yet, and, forgetting his gout and his rheumatism, thrust a portion of his clothes over his night attire, and sent his wife to order up Mr. Chase.

When the young clergyman entered, all agitated though he was, the appearance of his rector struck him as being somewhat ludicrous. The doctor had been startled out of a doze, that light sleep which is apt to steal over invalids as the daylight fades, and he looked but half awake; his face paler even than usual, and his long hair standing on end, just as if he had been drawn through a hedge. Dr. Remar had been accused of affectation in thus wearing his hair longer than was customary, but those who were prone to say so knew little of him: carelessness, inattention to personal appearance, had to do with the habit, not affectation. He was struggling into a waistcoat when Mr. Chase entered, and down he sat in his night-shirt sleeves.

In vain Mr. Chase offered explanations. Dr. Remar could not understand them: he really *could* not. His mind refused to take in the fact that it was within the range of possibility for an unknown deacon to fall in love with a Miss Remar.

"Are you in the full possession of your senses, sir?" he demanded at length, after listening to what Arthur had to say.

"Why, yes, sir, I hope so," deprecated Mr. Chase.

"It seems to me not," retorted the rector; "or else that you are forgetting all ideas of social decency, a more reprehensible crime than the other. Do you know that the young lady whom you would lower by your pretensions is my daughter, and that I am Prebendary Remar?"

"I am of good family, sir, as you are aware," suggested the young clergyman. "And though it would appear unseemly for me to aspire to Miss Remar under my present circumstances, I hope I am not going to remain a curate all my life."

"Have the goodness to confine yourself to facts, not hopes," coldly interposed Dr. Remar. "You are obscure, sir—excuse me, I don't enter into what you advance about 'family'—as a clergyman, you are obscure, and likely to remain so. I was a curate myself once; we must all be curates; but our promotion was assured before we entered the Church."—Dr. Remar's thoughts were probably reverting to his brethren of the stalls, as he spoke collectively. "We had interest to push us on: you have none. Sir, it is a positive insult to our order for *you* to cast a thought towards Miss Remar."

"Dr. Remar!" exclaimed Arthur, much agitated, "you look but on the worst side of things. I am not without friends: my uncle, from his wealth and position, must possess some interest, and he will no doubt use it for me. I may not long remain as I am now. Should circumstances change with me, should I be fortunate enough to obtain a good rank in the Church, may I then hope to renew my addresses to your daughter?"

"Never, sir! never! the question is absurd. If you ever do gain position, it may not be for years long after my daughter will have wedded in her own sphere. But did you attain it to-morrow, an insuperable bar would still exist: you have no private fortune to settle on a wife."

"Dr. Remar, let me beseech you——"

"Sir, no more; our interview is at an end," interrupted the doctor, imperatively, as he waved him from the room. "Confine your thoughts in future to their proper orbit, and never presume to let them wander to things above it. Upon reflecting over your conduct, I think you will find cause for shame at having abused the friendship and hospitality I incautiously accorded to you. Leave my house instantly, and henceforth bear in mind that our relations with each other will be confined to those of rector and curate."

As Mr. Chase descended the stairs he came upon Maria. She was lingering in the recess leading to the breakfast-room door, the rays of the hall lamp falling aslant her dress. Terrified, sick and shivering, she had been dreading the termination of the interview. He pushed open the room door, drew her in, and clasped her to his heart.

"Oh, Arthur! What hope is there?"

"None, Maria, for the present," he answered; and he put aside her clustering curls, and held her pale cheek against his. "Your father is bitterly against it: it is useless for me to conceal it, for you had better learn the truth from me, my darling, than from him. In honour, Maria, I ought not to be with you; and we may not again meet."

A low, wailing cry of pain burst from her.

"I may not fetter you by vows, Maria," he resumed: "I dare not, in honour, speak to you of hope for the future. Yet in my own heart hope is strong; it whispers that our separation will not be for always, though we must part for a time. God bless you and keep you, my dearest, until that time shall come! And should it never come——"

He stopped in agitation: he could not speak calmly of that probability. The tears were streaming from Maria's eyes, and she clung to him in the bitter overwhelming of despair. But Mr. Chase knew that he was transgressing in thus prolonging their interview: honour was alive within him now, however dead it might once have been, and with a brief, fervent embrace, a passionate straining of her to his beating heart, he turned to the hall door and passed out of it. Maria clasped her hands together, watching through the glass doors the last of that form which had become so necessary to her existence. But at that moment she heard her father's voice calling harshly to her. "It will kill me!" she murmured, as she turned to obey.

A good thing if it had killed her.

CHAPTER VII.

"MAY I NOT HOPE?"

THE months went on to autumn. At the window of her dressing-room, in the prebendal residence at Closeford, which window by way of prospect had the cathedral walls and some restless rooks that were always flying about and cawing, sat Maria Remar, her weakened frame propped up with pillows, and the hectic of some disorder that looked very like consumption deepening her cheek and glistening her eye.

The events of the previous April had been too much for her. The forced separation from Arthur Chase had impaired her health and strength. Dr. and Mrs. Remar had pointed out to her the impossibility of her ever seeing him more, and to guard against that event happening accidentally, she was at once removed to Closeford. She bowed to the will of her parents: she was by far too dutiful a child, had been too correctly brought up, to attempt to see or hear from Mr. Chase clandestinely; but the incessant struggle going on within her, the aching misery that filled her heart, the silence in which she buried her inward life, told upon her bodily health. No particular disease fell over her; nothing except debility; but when the weeks and months wore on, and she grew worse day by day, the frame weaker, the cheek brighter, the face and hands more attenuated, then people said that Maria Remar was dying. Oh, it was a

fearful time for Dr. Remar! To sacrifice his cherished pride and suffer his daughter to descend in the scale of "society," and become one with that poor, obscure curate, or to see her die before his eyes! He had to choose one of the two alternatives. But the prejudices of a prebendary, at least such a one as Dr. Remar, when were they overcome? *His* were not; for they formed part and parcel of himself. It was asserted, in the precincts, that Mrs. Remar went down upon her knees to her husband, beseeching him to relent and to save their child. But this may not have been true. It is certain that Mrs. Remar was overwhelmed with grief, grief so excessive that it could not be restrained before her friends and visitors, though she only spoke to them of Maria's illness, never of its cause, or hinting at Mr. Chase. But there was no relenting on the canon's part, for his curate remained unsummoned and unnoticed at Arnbrook, and Maria grew daily nearer to the grave. It may be that Dr. Remar did not take this sombre view of her case, that he thought time would suffice to restore her to health, or that some miracle would be wrought upon her.

One day, about eleven o'clock, Dr. Remar, with his usual abstracted air and restless step, was leaving the cathedral after morning prayers, when, as he emerged from the cloisters, his servant, old Andrew, stepped up to him.

"A gentleman has been waiting to see you almost ever since ten o'clock, sir," he observed. "Mr. Chase."

"*Who?*" cried Dr. Remar, arousing himself.

"Mr. Chase, from Arnbrook," repeated Andrew. "He is in the study, sir."

"The insolence—the presuming insolence of the fellow to intrude into my very house!" muttered Dr. Remar, striding on briskly. "It is well for him his twelvemonth is nearly up."

He went in with the sternest possible expression of face,

and his brown hair straggling about more than ever: it somehow had a knack of doing so, if anything put him out. But his visitor came forward to greet him with a bright smile and beaming glance.

"Insolent!" muttered the canon again. "To what am I indebted for this unexpected visit?" he haughtily inquired, vouchsafing no previous courtesy of words, and standing bolt upright near the door.

"I have come to ask for a few days' leave of absence, sir," replied the curate. "Yesterday afternoon's post brought me some most unexpected news. My poor cousin Durham Chase, has met with an accidental death, boating at Oxford; and my uncle has summoned me to his presence without delay."

"Without reference to my convenience, I suppose," observed the stately prebendary.

"Under the circumstances, Dr. Remar, I hope you will accord it to me. There may be business to be gone through —I don't know. I am the heir, now."

"What?" cried Dr. Remar, a little more briskly.

"The heir to the family estates and to Durham Park. My uncle has no other child living. God knows I sincerely grieve for my poor cousin; but—but in the midst of it, Dr. Remar, there is a thought that will intrude—that——"

"That what, sir?" interrupted the doctor, putting a sudden stop to his curate's hesitation.

"It does not become me to speak of these matters with my cousin yet unburied, but—may I not hope," he continued, still a little hesitatingly, and his fair features flushing, "that with this wonderful change in my prospects I may be allowed, on my return, to see Miss Remar? I hear, sir, she is fearfully ill."

"Miss Remar is not in robust health," replied the doctor. "But—to bring our present interview to a close—I will

accord you the leave of absence you require, in consideration of the melancholy circumstances under which it is demanded. Pray present my compliments and condolence to Mr. Chase."

The last sentence was quite sufficient—at least Arthur thought it so—to give promise that the heir to the broad lands of Durham, even though he did aspire to the hand of Miss Remar, would be received on a very different footing from that on which the poor curate had been.

And so it proved. On Arthur's return he made his proposals in due form, backed by the offer of a handsome settlement, and was admitted to an interview with Maria.

Only just before it took place, on the same morning, had she learnt from her mother the change in her prospects. She was painfully agitated when he entered, and he scarcely less so at witnessing the fearful change that a few months' mental disease had wrought. No words, at the moment, passed between them, but as the door closed behind Mr. Chase and he advanced towards her, Maria rose into a standing posture, and staggering a few steps forward, fainted as he caught her.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEMESIS.

We must now go back to Lavinia Glynn.

She was staying, when we last saw her, at that quiet little sea-coast town in Sussex. Not many weeks after the departure of him whom *she* only knew by the name of Durham, Mr. and Mrs. Glynn, fidgety as ever, discovered that the seaside did not agree with them any more than Norfolk had done, and they removed from it, and took up their final abode in London. But what a life was Lavinia's! Her whole thoughts, wild and unsubdued as they had always been, were concentred upon him whom she had set up in her heart to worship. As the months dragged their slow length along, and he never came or sent her word or token, the anguish of her reflections deepened into despair, but such despair that the calm mind can form no idea of. Night and day, night and day, she had no rest, or if she did, of sheer nature's weariness, sink into a troubled sleep, her dreams but renewed her waking misery by portraying the form of Mr. Durham.

It certainly cannot be necessary to explain here that Arthur Durham and Arthur Chase were one and the same person, for that the reader has long ago divined; but it may be essential to add a fact of which he as yet knows nothing, namely, that Mrs. Remar was the sister of Mr. Glynn. Very little intercourse had been kept up between

the families, living, as they did, widely apart; but when so important an event as the marriage of Maria drew on, the doctor and Mrs. Remar thought it right to recognize more closely the relationship, and they forwarded, quite at the eleventh hour, an invitation to the Glynns to visit Arnbrook for the ceremony.

How can we describe the change which had taken place in Maria? Reader, you have shivered through a dark, tempestuous night, on which no ray of light has gleamed to relieve the howling wind, the terrific storm, and watched it give place to the joy of morning, to the rising sun, the opening flowers, the dewy grass, the sweet carolling of the birds, and you have marvelled at the change. Even so was that wrought in Maria Remar.

The winter months had been spent by her in a trance of happiness, for they were again at Arnbrook Rectory, and Mr. Chase, who retained his curacy, was at her side. Her sweet face was now radiant with hope, and surely never did a union appear to advance under more genial auspices than that of hers with Arthur Chase. The marriage was to take place in April, and, after a temporary absence, they were to return and take possession of the Rectory House, Dr. and Mrs. Remar making their future home at Closeford. There was no necessity now, in relation to pecuniary matters, for Mr. Chase to remain in the Church, for his fortune would be abundant, but he preferred to do so. The laudable, it may be said serious, sentiments which had latterly grown up in his heart, were not lessened by his accession to wealth.

"Glynn? Glynn?" he exclaimed, the name of these new relations, new to him, grating on his ear; "of what county are they?"

"No particular county that I know of," replied Maria. "They reside in London."

"London, do they?" he rejoined, with a sigh of relief.

"Why?" asked Maria. "Did you recognize the name?"

"Yes. A—college friend—of mine was named Glynn."

You may well blush, Reverend Arthur, and draw that girl's fair face to yours, for it is a blush that you don't care she should penetrate. But it wants scarce a week now to the wedding, and they have other things than names to talk about. Especially as Mr. Chase was going away that evening for several days.

"We will not go," decided Lavinia, upon the arrival of the invitation. "What are the Remars to us? Or this curate!" The old habit, you see, reader, of consulting her own imperious will: and Mr. and Mrs. Glynn acceded passively. They had never yet done otherwise. But the maid, Dobson, the former dangerous confidant, was Lavinia's confidant still, and she urged her young mistress to reverse her determination.

"Mr. Durham," argued Dobson, and the colour rushed violently to Lavinia's face, as it always did at the mention of that name, "never comes to seek you, he never means to: and, were he so inclined, he has no clue to where we are living."

Lavinia listened impatiently.

"It seems to me, then, that if you care to find him you must go out into the world. You may drop upon him in some odd corner of it. And if not, any change for you, Miss Lavinia, must be beneficial; rather than you should continue in this dead-alive state, without hope, without energy, your very life buried in the past!"

"Then let us go!" exclaimed Lavinia, one of the ideas suggested serving to arouse her from her apathy. It is probable, however, that the servant had only spoken interestedly: *she* may have had no objection to vary the monotony of her life by a country excursion. "Get over the preparations as quickly as you can, Dobson," continued

Lavinia; "we will go into Closefordshire." And Mr. and Mrs. Glynn once more bowed to her redecision

It wanted but three days to the marriage when the family arrived at Arnbrook Rectory.

"How thin and pale you are!" exclaimed Maria to her cousin, when they were growing sociable. "I had always pictured you as being so different—the very image of health. You must have altered of late years."

"Perhaps I have," returned Lavinia, crimsoning violently; "I don't know. But tell me of your future husband, Maria. Is he handsome? What is his name?"

"Arthur," replied Miss Remar, passing by the first question.

"Arthur?" almost screamed Lavinia.

"What is the matter?" said Maria. "Do you not like the name?"

"*Do I not like it!*" murmured Lavinia to herself, her eyes filling with tears · "what other name can to me bring its charm with it?"

The day preceding the wedding arrived, and Mr. Chase had not returned, but he was expected by the evening coach from Closeford. An afternoon stage brought certain paraphernalia connected with the approaching ceremony; to wit, the wreath that Maria was to wear, and the bonnet for Mrs. Remar. The young ladies eagerly took up the wreath; when it was discovered that by some strange oversight (the wrong wreath probably forwarded) orange blossoms had been omitted in its construction.

"There is no time to send it back," observed Mrs. Remar; "we must go to the milliner's in the village and get a few sprays from her to mix with the wreath. She told me to-day she had some fresh ones."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Maria. "I daresay she ordered them on purpose, hoping we might want some. Buy them all, mamma."

Accordingly, when dinner was over, the two elder ladies took their way to the village after these orange blossoms, leaving Dr. Remar and Mr. Glynn at the desert-table, and Lavinia and Maria in the drawing-room. Maria took the wreath out of the box, and began pulling out a spray here and there to make room for the additional ones she would have to put in.

Just at that time Dobson was in the kitchen gossiping with the cook, when the evening stage from Closeford, the very one which had first brought Arthur Chase to the house, drew up to the rectory-gate. Dobson started from her seat and rushed to the window.

"Is not that Mr. Durham?" she exclaimed.

The cook ranged her eyes round the landscape, and ranged them again before she answered. "I don't see nobody but Mr. Chase."

"There! that gentleman coming up to the house. He is leaving the path and crossing the lawn. It is surely Mr. Durham."

"That is Mr. Chase, I tell you," cried the cook. "He is going in through the breakfast-room windows: he often does."

"What does he want here?" demanded Dobson.

"Want here!" retorted the cook: "why, that's Miss Maria's bridegroom."

"Heaven be good to me!" exclaimed Dobson, startlingly, "you don't mean to tell me it is *that* man who is to marry Miss Remar?"

Without waiting for any answer, she ran swiftly from the apartment, the cook looking after her in amazement, and remarking that the girl must be "gone crazy" in the head.

Dobson came up with Mr. Chase as he entered the breakfast-room by the window, the pleasant apartment which the reader was first introduced to at Arbrook Rectory.

The room had two doors to it, one leading to the hall, the other opening to the dining-room. This latter door was ajar, and Dr. Remar and Mr. Glynn, who were within, could hear every word that passed. Dobson had run so quickly that her breath was gone, and, without speaking, she seized Mr. Chase by the arm.

"Ah—what—*you*, Dobson!" he ejaculated, his equanimity slightly shaken. "What brings you here?"

"My better angel, I trust," replied the woman, who, whatever her faults, was attached to Lavinia Glynn. "I should rather ask what brings you here, Mr. Durham, when you ought long ago to have been with Miss Lavinia."

"My good woman, don't talk so loud. All that is past and gone."

"Past and gone for you, sir, but not for her. You know well that you gained her whole love and solemnly vowed to marry her, and that you *ought* to marry her."

"The truth is I was wild and young and careless, and I did talk nonsense to Miss Glynn. I am sorry, and, were the time to come over again, I would not do so; but it can't be helped now. Loose my arm, Dobson."

"Not till you promise to make her reparation. Talked nonsense, indeed!"

"I know of none that I can make," answered Mr. Chase, essaying to free his arm, without violence, from Dobson. But the woman's grasp was strong and determined.

"There is only one way, sir—marriage; keep to your promise and marry her. You can do that."

"Don't talk nonsense!" he exclaimed angrily. "Release your hold, Dobson, or you will compel me to use force."

"They say you are about to marry her cousin, Miss Remar."

"Her cousin!" he cried aghast.

"Yes; her own cousin. And now, sir, if you persist in

that, I swear I will stop the marriage. You must marry Miss Lavinia, and no one else."

"Absurd!" he uttered haughtily, his temper rising, as he wrenched his arm from her. "Lavinia Glynn is no fitting wife for me."

Dobson was silent, perhaps Mr. Chase thought *silenced*, and he left a bank-note in her hand as he turned from the room. However potent its influence might have been at ordinary times, Dobson flung it to the floor now. Had she been aware of its value, she might have treated it with less disdain.

Mr. Chase went upstairs and entered the drawing-room, and following, walked Mrs. Remar and Mrs. Glynn, who had just returned. In the obscurity of the fading day, he did not recognize Lavinia Glynn, but advanced to Maria, and stole a greeting.

But Lavinia knew *him*, and all sense of outward objects, saving himself, seemed to leave her. A mist rose before her eyes, the room swam round, consciousness of those in it faded from her remembrance, and she fell at his feet with a cry of pain, and clasped his knees in her wild, ungovernable impetuosity.

"Oh, Arthur! my love! my promised husband! I thought you would never come! How could you desert me and leave me to these years of dreadful despair?"

"What mistake is this?" broke from the dismayed lips of Mrs. Remar. "Is not this gentleman a stranger to you, Lavinia?"

"Arthur, dearest, speak to them!" she implored; "tel them we are no strangers. Would we had been!"

What Mr. Chase was about to stammer forth in explanation he alone can tell; but Mr. Glynn now entered the room and strode forward, his voice raised in passion.

"Mr. Chase—if that be your name—may I inquire if the

conversation you have just held with a person in the breakfast-room had reference to this young lady, Miss Glynn?"

"He knows it had," cried Dobson, advancing from behind and giving vent to her anger. "Deny it if you dare, Mr. Durham?"

"I met with this young lady two years ago, and—a—few nonsensical love-passages passed between us, nothing more," stammered the young clergyman from between his livid lips. He, perhaps, was as anxious to save her reputation as to exculpate himself.

"Liar!" uttered Dobson, confronting him. "May I never stir from this spot," she vehemently added, addressing those around, "if he did not win her love and confidence and promise to marry her by all the most sacred vows in the sight of heaven; and she believed him, and has just been breaking her heart for him ever since. But he was not Mr. Chase; he called himself Durham then!"

There was a dead silence. Lavinia had buried her head at the feet of Mr. Chase, and he looked ready to go into the next world, he was so agitated and ghastly. Dr. Remar spoke up.

"Sir," he said, pointing to Lavinia, "are you prepared to marry this young lady?"

"My sins are being heavily visited upon me," murmured the unhappy young man. "I——"

"No subterfuge, sir," thundered forth the rector. "I demand a plain answer."

"I cannot marry her," he replied, turning from the fallen girl with a shudder. "I can marry none save her who was about to become my dear wife."

"And that you shall never do!" said Prebendary Remar.

Some one thought then of looking round for Maria. She was standing behind, *laughing*, though the laugh seemed fixed and rigid, the wreath clenched in her closed hand;

and there was a stony aspect in her face, a glassiness in her eyes, which startled them all.

Her mother hastened to her and spoke, but she did not seem to hear or to know any one. Mr. Chase essayed to arouse her, and under the circumstances, in their terrible fear for her reason, they suffered him to approach her, ere he made his exit from the house; but she was equally insensible to him as to the rest. They removed her to bed, and sent for half the physicians of Closeford; but as the days went on, though her features resumed their ordinary aspect, it was found that her intellect was irrecoverably gone.

Not at first was she removed to an asylum, but it was at length thought that the care, the rational treatment pursued in those receptacles, might eventually prove of benefit; and she was placed where the reader first saw her. She was never violent, and, save upon that one subject, could scarcely be said to be insane, but the delusion that she was about to be married did not leave her, and in the coldest day in winter they dared not dress her in anything but white; whenever they attempted it, her distress was painful to witness and difficult to soothe. Her only occupation was that of weaving wreaths: and she could not be won to any other. It would seem that some chord of memory, unexplainable to us, was touched, connecting her imagination with that fatal night and the wreath she held. In summer they provided her with fresh garden flowers, in winter with artificial ones, and she wove them into garlands. When they were finished and laid aside, an attendant, unseen by her, cut the string, and scattered the flowers into the basket, ready for the ill-fated girl to use again. One of her delusions was, that her father and mother were keeping her lover from her, and after each interview with them her silent sobs and tears were excessive, lasting for hours. This

caused the medical men to forbid their visiting her, save at rare intervals. A painful prohibition for Dr. Remar: no wonder, all things considered, that his hair turned white. Mrs. Remar soon passed to a world where sorrow and suffering cannot enter.

I can tell you nothing of Lavinia Glynn—nothing good. It is said that her parents' hearts, so idolatrously bound up in her, were broken. She left their house, and entered upon a reckless career, and people "talked" much of her, but she never again saw Mr. Chase after that dread, explanatory hour.

And what became of him—Arthur Chase? Truly, as he said, his sins were visited heavily upon him. Many curious versions of the affair came out to the world, in most of which the young clergyman was represented as a sinful fiend—a second Satan. Opinions were divided as to whether his gown would be taken from him, some holding that it would. Others ridiculed the idea. "If every clergyman," they reasoned, "were to lose his gown for peccadilloes committed before he wore it, the bishops would have enough to do"—which nobody can deny. Mr. Chase, however, settled the matter himself, by quietly resigning it, and was the Reverend Arthur Chase no more. He left Closefordshire, and, after his uncle's death, resided at Durham Park, leading so quiet a life, that the neighbours said he would relapse into what his uncle was before him—a misanthrope. But he carried on great improvements on his estate, and no one ever applied to him for assistance in vain. In a neighbouring town, populous, and not famed for its morality, his stealthy deeds of charity were well known. The erection of a large, well-appointed building in it was one of his very first acts: it is a reformatory asylum for the outcasts of society. An imposing door, with pillars, forms its chief entrance, and over this door, in small letters

that do not readily catch the eye, is engraved a verse from the Holy Scriptures:

"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: *but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*"

MR. CASTONEL.

MR. CASTONEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEAUTIES OF EBURY.

AN unusual sensation was created one day in the village of Ebury, by a report that somebody had taken the long-uninhabited house, with the stone balcony and green verandah, which was situated in the centre of the street.

Who could have hired it? The whole village was asking the question one of another. Those cousins of the Smiths, or the people who had come on a visit to the Hall, and professed to like Ebury so well? No, none of these. It was a stranger from London, quite unknown to every one, for there soon appeared a shining zinc plate on the newly-varnished oak-door, bearing in large, very prominent letters, "Mr. Gervase Castonel. Consulting Surgeon."

Ebury was in ecstasies. A fashionable doctor was what the place wanted above all things; as to Winnington, he was nothing but an apothecary, old now and stupid. Only three days before, so the tale went round the whist-tables, when he was called in to Mrs. Major Acre, an elderly dowager, he had the insolence to tell her he could do her little good; that if she would eat less and walk more, she would not want a doctor. They had put up with Winnington,

especially when he had his young and agreeable partner, a gentleman of fortune and position, who had joined him some time before. But this gentleman's wife had fallen into ill-health, which had caused him to quit Ebury and seek a warmer climate.

Mr. Gervase Castonel arrived, and took possession of his residence. You all know how fond we are apt to be of fresh faces, but you cannot know how rapturously fond Ebury at once grew of his. And yet to a dispassionate observer it was not a prepossessing face: it was silent, pale and unfathomable, with a grey impenetrable eye that disliked to look at you; and dark hair. They tried to guess his age: some said five-and-twenty, some thirty: it is most probably near the latter; a small-made man of middle height.

Poor Mr. Winnington! He had attended Ebury and the county round for forty years, walking unostentatiously on his two legs, and never, unless the distance was really beyond them, using a horse or carriage, and then it was borrowed or hired. But he had to witness the *début* of Mr. Castonel in a stylish cab with a tiger behind it; both of the newest London importation; Mr. Castonel's arms being emblazoned on the cab, and Mr. Castonel's taste on the boy's dress. He never stirred a professional yard without this cab. If a patient at the next door called him in, the cab took him there. Generally the boy would be hoisted up, holding on by the straps, after the approved manner of tigers; sometimes, when it was Mr. Castonel's pleasure not to drive himself, he sat by his master's side and took the reins. Mr. Castonel had a habit of sitting very back in his cab, and the lad also, so that when its head was up they were invisible; and in this way the cab would go dashing at a fierce rate up and down the street. Until Ebury became familiar with this peculiarity it was the cause of no end of terror, pedestrians believing

that the spirited horse, without a guide, was making for their unfortunate bodies. Two of these horses were possessed by Mr. Castonel—fine, valuable animals, and one or other was always to be seen with the cab behind it. Surely never did a stranger fall into so extensive a practice, to judge by appearances, as did Mr. Gervase Castonel.

The first patient he was summoned to was Mrs. Major Acre. It may be observed that a family in Ebury once wrote a note of invitation to Mrs. Major Acre, and omitted the "Major." She at once returned the letter, with an intimation that Mrs. *Major* Acre declined acquaintance with them: so we will take care not to fall under a similar calamity. Mr. Castonel was called in to Mrs. Major Acre, and she was charmed with him. He sympathized so feelingly with her ailments; but assured her that in a little time, under his treatment, she would not have a symptom left. That horrid Winnington, she confided to him, had told her she wanted nothing but walking and fasting. Oh, as to Winnington, Mr. Castonel rejoined, with a contemptuous curl of his wire-drawn, impenetrable lips, what could be expected of an apothecary? He (Mr. Castonel) hoped soon to leave no patients to *his* mercy. And this was repeated by Mrs. Major Acre wherever she went; and she took care to go everywhere to laud the praises of the consulting surgeon; so that people almost longed for a tender fit of illness, that they might put themselves under the bland and fostering care of Mr. Castonel.

Time goes on with us all, and it did with Ebury. In six months not a single patient remained with Mr. Winnington, all had flown to Mr. Gervase Castonel; for that gentleman, in spite of his flaring zinc plate, proved to be a general practitioner. We must except one or two intimate friends of Mr. Winnington's; and we must except the poor, those

who could not pay. Mr. Castonel had made an ostentatious announcement that he should give advice gratis from nine to ten o'clock on Tuesdays and Fridays, but the few poor who accepted the invitation found him so repellent and unsympathizing that they were thankful to return to kind old Mr. Winnington, who had not only attended them without charge at their own homes; but had done much towards supplying their bodily wants also. Mr. Winnington had been neglectful of gain: perhaps his having no family had rendered him so. He had never married, he and his sister having always lived together: but just before her death, a niece, Caroline Hall, then left an orphan, came home to them. To describe his affection for this girl would be impossible: it may be questioned if Caroline returned it as it deserved—but when is the love of the aged for the young ever repaid in kind? The pleasure and delights of visiting filled her heart, and her uncle's home and society were only regarded as things to be escaped from. Was he yet awake to this? There was something worse for him to awake to, by-and-by, something that as yet he suspected not. He was much changed: had been changing ever since the establishment in Ebury of Mr. Castonel: his face had acquired a grey tinge like his hair, his merry tongue was hushed, and people said he looked as if his heart were breaking. It is hard to bear ingratitude: ingratitude from those with whom we have lived for sixty years. It was not for the value of the practice: no, no: he had that which would last him his life, and leave something behind him: but it was the unkindness that was telling upon Mr. Winnington, the desertion for a stranger, one in reality less skilled than he was.

Frances Chavasse stood in her mother's drawing-room, and, with her, the daughter of the Rector of Ebury, the Reverend Christopher Leicester. Ellen Leicester had come

in after dinner to spend the afternoon with Frances; for Ebury, though it called itself an aristocratic place, usually dined in the middle of the day. They were both lovely girls, about nineteen, though unlike in feature as in disposition. They were called the beauties of Ebury. Caroline Hall got classed with them also, but it arose from her constantly associating with them, not from her good looks. She was two or three years older, had a sallow face with dark hair, and lively, pleasant dark eyes. An absurd story had gone abroad, but died away again; that Mr. Castonel, upon being asked which of the three was most to his taste, replied that only two of them were, but he'd marry the three for all that.

The two young ladies were talking eagerly, for Mrs. Major Acre had just paid them a visit, and disclosed a piece of intelligence which completely astounded her hearers—that Miss Hall was about to be married to Mr. Castonel.

"It is impossible that it can be true," Mrs. Chavasse and her daughter had exclaimed in the same quick, positive, eager tones, for they were the counterpart of each other in manner. "Old Winnington hates Mr. Castonel like poison!"

"I know he does. And I was told it was for that very reason Mr. Castonel is bent upon having her," said Mrs. Major; "that he may mortify the old apothecary, and take from him the only treasure he has left—Caroline."

"Oh, that's all Ebury gossip," decided Mrs. Chavasse. "A well-established man like Mr. Castonel will take care to marry according to his fancy, not to gratify pique. Mr. Winnington will never give his consent."

"He has given it," answered the major's widow. "Caroline's will is law, there. I wish she may find it so in her new home."

"Well," added Mrs. Chavasse, dubiously, "I don't know

that Mr. Castonel is altogether the man I should choose to give a daughter to. Such curious things are said of him—about that mysterious person, you know."

"Grapes are sour," thought Mrs. Major Acre to herself. "And now I have told you the news, I must go," she said, rising. "Good-bye to you all. My compliments at the parsonage, my dear Miss Ellen."

Mrs. Chavasse went out with the lady, and it happened that immediately afterwards Caroline Hall entered. Ellen and Frances regarded her with a curiosity they had never yet manifested, and Frances spoke impulsively.

"How sly you were over it, Caroline!—Now, don't pretend to deny it, or you'll put me in a temper. We know all about it, just as much as yourself. If you chose to keep it from others, you might have told Ellen and me."

"How could I tell you what I did not know myself?"

"Nay, Caroline, you must have known it," interposed the sweet, gentle voice of Ellen Leicester.

"I did not know I was going to be married. You might have seen there was"—she hesitated, and blushed—"an attachment between myself and Mr. Castonel, if your eyes had been open."

"I declare I never saw anything that could cause me to think he was attached to you," abruptly uttered Miss Chavasse, looking at her.

"Nor I," repeated Ellen Leicester. And the young ladies spoke truly.

"I may have seen you talking together in evening society, perhaps even gone the length of a little dash of flirtation," said Miss Chavasse. "But what has that to do with marriage? Everybody flirts. I shall have a dozen flirtations before I settle down to marry."

"That all depends upon the disposition," returned Miss Hall. "You may; but Ellen Leicester never will."

"Ellen dare not," laughed Frances. "She would draw down the old walls of the parsonage about her ears if *she* committed so heinous a sin. But I must return to what I said, Caroline, that it was unfriendly not to let us know it."

"The puzzle is, how you know it now," observed Caroline. "The interview, when Mr. Castonel asked my uncle for me, only took place last night, and I have not spoken of it to any one."

"Oh, news travels fast enough in Ebury," answered Frances, carelessly. "If I were to cut my finger now with this penknife, every house would know it before to-night. Mr. Winnington may have mentioned it."

"I am quite sure that it has not passed his lips."

"Then the report must have come from Mr. Castonel!" exclaimed Frances. "How very strange!"

"My uncle is not well to-day," added Miss Hall, "and has seen no one. He has a great fire made up in the drawing-room, and is stewing himself close to it. The room's as hot as an oven."

"A fire this weather!" repeated Frances. "What is the matter with him?"

"Nothing particular that I know of. He sits and sighs and never speaks. He only spoke once between breakfast and dinner: and that was to ask me if I felt Mr. Castonel was a man calculated to make me happy. Of course he is."

"Caroline," whispered Miss Leicester, "do you not fear it is your marriage that is preying on his spirits?"

"I know it is. He would not consent for a long while. The interview was anything but agreeable. He and Mr. Castonel were together at first, and then I was called in. At last he gave it. But he does not like Mr. Castonel. I suppose from his having taken his practice from him."

"A very good reason too," said Miss Chavasse, bluntly.

"Oh, I don't know," carelessly returned Caroline. "It

is all luck in this world. If people persist in sending for Gervase, he can't refuse to go. My uncle is old now."

Ellen Leicester looked up, reproach seated in her deep blue eyes. But Caroline Hall resumed:

"It is more than dislike that he has taken to Mr. Castonel; it is prejudice. He cried like a child after Gervase had gone, saying he would rather I had chosen any one else in the world, he had rather I kept single for life,-than marry Mr. Castonel. And Muff says she heard him sighing and groaning on his pillow all night long."

"And oh, Caroline," exclaimed Ellen Leicester, in shocked, hushed tones, "can you think of marrying him now?"

"My uncle has consented," said Caroline, evasively.

"Yes; but in what way? If you have any spark of dutiful feeling, you will now prove your gratitude to your uncle for all his love and care of you."

"Prove it how?"

"By giving up Mr. Castonel."

Caroline Hall turned and looked at her, then spoke impressively. "It is easy to talk, Ellen, but when the time comes for you to love, and should *he* be unacceptable to your parents, you will then understand how impossible is what you ask of me. That calamity may come."

"Never," was the almost scornful reply of Miss Leicester. "My father and mother's wishes will ever be first with me."

"I tell you you know nothing about it," repeated Caroline. "Remember my words hereafter."

"Do not [illegible] about what you will never [illegible]," interrupted Miss Chayasse. "When is the wedding to be, Caroline?"

"I suppose almost immediately. So Mr. Castonel wishes."

"He is not so great a favourite in the place as he was when he first came. People also say that he is a general admirer. So take care, Caroline."

"I know few people with whom he is not a favourite," retorted Caroline, warmly. "My uncle is one; Mr. Leicester, I believe, is another. Are there any more?"

"You need not take me up so sharply," laughed Frances. "I only repeated what I have heard. Take your things off, Caroline, and remain to tea."

Caroline Hall hesitated. "My uncle is so lonely. Still," she added, after a pause, "I can do him no good, and as to trying to raise his spirits, it's a hopeless task. Yes, I will stay, Frances."

She was glad to accept any excuse to get away from the home she had so little inclination for, utterly regardless of the lonely hours of the poor old man. Frances, careless and pleased, hastened to help her off with her things. But Ellen Leicester, more considerate, painfully reproached her in her heart of hearts.

Mr. Castonel found his way that evening to the house of Mr. Chavasse. Soon after he came, Mrs. Chavasse, who was in her garden, saw the rector pass. She went to the gate and leaned over it to shake hands with him.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked, being one who was ever ready to retail gossip. "Caroline Hall is going to be married."

"Indeed!" he answered, in an accent of surprise. "I have been much at Mr. Winnington's lately, and have heard nothing of it."

"She marries Mr. Castonel."

There was a pause. The clergyman seemed as though unable to comprehend the words. "Mrs. Chavasse, I hope you are under a mistake," he said at last. "I think you are."

"No; it was all settled yesterday with old Winnington. Caroline told me so herself: she and Mr. Castonel are both here now."

"I am grieved to hear it! Mr. Castonel is not the man I would give a child to."

"That's just what I said. Will you walk in?"

"Not now. I will call for Ellen by-and-by."

"Not before nine," said Mrs. Chavasse.

There were those in Ebury who had called Mr. Castonel an attractive man, but I think it would have puzzled them to tell in what his attractions lay. He was by no means good-looking; though perhaps not what could be called plain; one peculiarity of his, was, that he hated music: and in society he was silent rather than otherwise. Yet he generally found favour with the ladies: they are pretty certain to like one who has the reputation of being a general admirer. Had a stranger, that evening, been present in the drawing-room of Mrs. Chavasse, he would not have suspected Mr. Castonel was on the point of marriage with Miss Hall, for his gallant attentions to Frances Chavasse and Ellen Leicester, his evident admiration for both, were inconsistently apparent—especially considering the presence of Caroline. What she thought, it is impossible to say. She left early, and Mr. Castonel attended her as far as her home.

Mr. Leicester had taken his way to the house of Mr. Winnington. The surgeon was cowering over the fire, as Caroline had described. He shook hands with Mr. Leicester without rising, and pointed in silence to a chair. He looked very ill; scarcely able to speak.

"I have heard some tidings about Caroline," began the rector.

Mr. Winnington groaned. "Oh, my friend, my friend," he said, "I have need of strong consolation under this affliction."

"You disapprove, no doubt, of Mr. Castonel?"

"Disapprove!" he repeated, roused to energy; "believe

me, I would rather Caroline went before me, than leave her the wife of Gervase Castonel."

"Then why have you consented?"

"I had no help for it," he sadly uttered. "They were before me, in this room, both of them, and they told me they only cared for each other. Mr. Castonel informed me that if I refused my consent it was of little consequence, for he should take her without it. She is infatuated with him; and how and where they can have met so frequently, as it appears they have done, is a wonder to me. Oh, he is of a mean, dishonourable spirit! And I have my doubts about his liking her—*liking* her, even."

"Then why should he seek to marry her?" cried the rector in surprise.

"I know not. I have been thinking about it all night and all day, and can come to no conclusion. Save one," he added, dropping his voice, "which is firm upon me, and will not leave me: the conviction that he will not treat her well. Would you," he asked, suddenly looking up, "would you give him Ellen?"

"No," most emphatically replied Mr. Leicester. "I believe him to be a bad, immoral man. My calling takes me continually amongst the poor, and I can tell you Mr. Castonel is much more warmly welcomed by the daughters than the parents. But nothing tangible has hitherto been brought against him. He is a deep man."

"His covert behaviour as to Caroline proves his depth. What about that strange person who followed him to Ebury, and took the little lodge? You know what I mean."

"I can learn nothing of her," answered Mr. Leicester. "She lives on there, with that female attendant. I called once, but she told me she must beg to decline my visits, as she wished to live in strict retirement. I suppose I should

not have seen her at all, but the other person was out, and she came to the door."

"I met her once," said Mr. Winnington. "She is very handsome."

"Too handsome and too young to be living in so mysterious a way," remarked the rector, significantly. "She has evidently been reared as a gentlewoman; her accent and manner are perfectly ladylike and refined. Did you mention her to Mr. Castonel?"

"I did. And he answered in an indifferent, haughty manner that the lady was a connexion of his own family, who chose, for reasons of her own, good and upright, though they were kept secret, to pass her days just now in retirement. He added that her character was unimpeachable, and no one, to him, should dare impugn it. What could I answer?"

"Very true. And it *may* be as he says: though the circumstances wear so suspicious an appearance."

"Oh that he had never come to Ebury!" exclaimed the surgeon, clasping his hands with emotion. "Not for the injury he has done to me professionally; and I believe *striven* to do, for there was room for us both: I have forgiven him this with all my heart, as it becomes a Christian, near the grave, to do. But my conviction tells me he is a bad man, a mysterious man—yes, my friend, I repeat it, a mysterious man—I feel him to be so, though it is an assertion I cannot explain; and I feel that he will assure Caroline's misery instead of happiness."

"Still, unless he is attached to her, I do not see why he should wed her," repeated the rector. "She has no fortune to tempt his cupidity."

"Nor do I see it," replied Mr. Winnington. "But it is so."

Mr Leicester sat there an hour, and then proceeded to

visit some cottages. On his return, he cut across the fields, a near way, for he found it was getting dark, and close upon the time he intended to call for Ellen. As he passed the corner of Beech Wood, a retired spot just there, near to the pretty, but very small lodge originally built for a gamekeeper, who should he suddenly encounter but its present inmate, the lady he and Mr. Winnington had been speaking of. Her arm was within Mr. Castonel's, and she was talking rapidly, in tones, as it seemed, of remonstrance. The gentlemen bowed as they passed each other; both coldly; and had Mr. Leicester turned to scan the doctor's face, he would have seen on it a sneer of malignant triumph.

"I never saw a case more open to suspicion in my life," muttered the clergyman to himself. "And he just come from the presence of his future wife."

CHAPTER II.

MRS. MUFF'S DELAY.

"Come, Hannah, look alive," cried Mrs. Muff, some two months subsequent to the above details; "wash those decanters first: there's one short, but I'll see to that. Now you need not touch the knives: Jem will clean them all in the morning. Do as I bid you, and then get out and dust the best china."

"There's the door bell," said Hannah.

"Go and answer it, and don't be an hour over it. I dare say it's the man with the potted meats. Tell him the rolls must be here in the morning by ten o'clock."

A most valuable person was Mrs. Muff in her vocation, and highly respected throughout Ebury. An upright, portly, kindly-looking woman, of four or five and fifty, with an auburn "front," whose curls were always scrupulously smooth. She had for many years held the important situation of housekeeper at the Hall: but changes had occurred there, as they do in many places. On the death of Mr. Winnington's sister, she had accepted the post of housekeeper to him, and had been there ever since. Hannah, a damsel of twenty, being under her.

"Well, was it the baker?" she demanded, as Hannah returned to the kitchen.

"No, ma'am. It was another wedding present for Miss Caroline, with Mrs. Major Acre's compliments. I took it up to her; she's in the drawing-room with Mr. Castonel."

"Ah!" groaned the housekeeper.—"Look at the dust on those glasses, Hannah. I thought you said you had wiped them."

"And what harm, ma'am, either?" returned Hannah, who very well understood the nature of the groan. "She'll be his wife to-morrow."

"Who said there was harm?" sharply retorted Mrs. Muff. "Only my poor master! he is so lonely, and it is the last evening she'll be here. Where are you running off to now? I told you to finish the decanters."

"Master called out for some coal as I passed the parlour," answered Hannah. "The puzzle to me is, how he can bear a fire, this sultry August weather."

"Ah, child, you'll come to the end of many puzzles before you arrive at my years. Master's old and chilly, and breaking up as fast as he can break. I'll take the coal in myself."

Mr. Winnington did not look up, as the housekeeper put the coal on. But afterwards, when she was busy at the sideboard, he called out in sudden, quick tones—"Mrs. Muff."

"Sir!" she answered.

"What are you doing there?"

"I am changing the sherry wine, sir, into the old decanter. We want this one to put ready with the others."

"For the show to-morrow?" he went on.

"To be sure, sir. For nothing else."

"Ay, Muff, put everything in order," he continued. "Don't let it be said that I opposed any of their wishes; an old man such as I am, whom they will be glad to see out of the world. And you need not trouble yourself to put things up afterwards: they will be wanted again."

"For what purpose, sir?" she inquired.

"For the funeral."

Mrs. Muff, as she said afterwards, was struck all of a heap. And Mr. Winnington resumed:

"After a wedding comes a burying. She is beginning the cares of life, and I am giving them up for ever. And something tells me she will have her share of them. I shall not be here to stand by her, Muff, so you must."

The housekeeper trembled as she heard. He had a queer look on his face that she did not like.

"I'll do what I can, sir," she said. "But when Miss Caroline has left here, that will be but little."

"You can go where she goes, Muff."

"Perhaps not, sir."

"Perhaps yes. Will you promise to do so, if you can—if any possible way is opened? Promise me," he added, eagerly and feverishly.

"Well, sir," she answered, to humour him, "if it shall be agreeable to all parties, yes, I will promise."

"And you will shield her from him, as far as you can?"

"Yes," repeated the housekeeper, most imperfectly understanding what Caroline was to be shielded from.

"Now, Mrs. Muff," he concluded, in a solemn tone, "that's a death bargain. Remember it."

"You don't seem well, sir," was Mrs. Muff's rejoinder. "Shall I call Miss Caroline to you?"

"No," he sadly answered. "Let her be."

She was in the drawing-room with Mr. Castonel, as has been stated, laughing, talking, joking, unmindful of her fond uncle, who was dying in the room beneath. Her dress was a cool summer muslin, very pretty, with its open sleeves, her dark hair was worn in bands, and her dark eyes were animated. She began showing him some of the presents she had received that day, and slipped a bracelet on her arm to display it.

"That is an elegant trinket," observed Mr. Castonel. "Who is it from?"

"Ellen Leicester."

"Oh," he hastily rejoined, "I heard it said to-day that she is not going to church with you—that the parson's starch will not let her do so."

"It is true," said Caroline. "I did not tell you of it, Gervase, because I thought it might annoy you, as it had done me."

"Annoy *me!* Oh dear, no. Let me hear what his objections were: what he said."

"I only gathered the substance of them from Mrs. Leicester. You know my uncle does not approve our union, though he did give his consent. So on that score, I believe, Mr. Leicester declined to allow Ellen to be one of my bridesmaids - he would not directly sanction what he was pleased to call an undutiful measure."

"I wonder he condescends to marry us," remarked Mr. Castonel, with that peculiar sneer, cunning and malignant, on his face, which even Caroline disliked to see.

"That he could not refuse. It is in his line of duty. Ellen is so vexed. We three had always promised each other that the two left would be bridesmaids to whichever was married first, I, Ellen, and Frances Chavasse."

Mr. Castonel laughed, a strange, ringing laugh, as if something amused him much; and Caroline looked at him in surprise.

The wedding-day dawned; not too promisingly. In the first place, the brilliant weather had suddenly changed, and the day rose pouring wet. In the second, Mr. Winnington, who, however, had never intended to go to church with them, was too ill to rise. Miss Chavasse was bridesmaid, and by half-past ten Gervase Castonel and Caroline Hall had been united for better for worse, until *death* did part them. Next came the breakfast, the Reverend Mr. Leicester, who had officiated, declining to go and partake of it, and then the bride and bridegroom started off in a

carriage-and-four to spend a short honeymoon. Before they returned, Mr. Winnington was dead.

Again, reader, six months have elapsed, for time, as I told you, slipped on at Ebury as fast as it does at other places. No medical opponent had started, so Mr. Castonel had the professional swing of the whole place and was getting on in it at railway speed. We are now in the cold drizzly month of February, and it is a drizzling wretched day. In the bright kitchen, however, of Mr Castonel, little signs are seen of the outside weather. The fire burns clear, and the kettle sings, the square of carpet, never put down until all cooking is over, extends itself before the hearth, and good Mrs. Muff is presiding over all, her feet on a warm footstool, and her spectacles on nose for she has drawn the stand before her on which rests her Bible. Presently a visitor came in, a figure clothed in travelling attire, limp and moist, introduced by the tiger John, who had encountered it at the door as he was going out on an errand for his master.

"My goodness me, Hannah! it's never you?"

"Yes, ma'am, it is," was Hannah's reply, with a low obeisance to Mrs. Muff.

"And why did you not come yesterday as was agreed upon?"

"It rained so hard with us, mother said I had better wait; but as to-day turned out little better, I came through it. She'd have paid for an inside place, but the coach was full, so I came outside."

"Well, get off your wet things, and we'll have a cup of tea," said Mrs. Muff, rising and setting the tea-things.

"Mother sends her duty to you, ma'am," said Hannah, as she sat down to the tea-table, after obeying directions, "and bade me say she was obliged to you for kindly thinking of me, and getting me a place under you again."

"Ah! we little thought, some months back, that we should ever be serving Mr. Castonel."

"Nothing was ever further from my thoughts, ma'am."

"I wished to come and live with Miss Caroline; I had my own reasons for it," resumed Mrs. Muff; "and, as luck had it, she had a breeze with the maids here, after she came home, and gave them both warning. I fancy they had done as they liked too long under Mr. Castonel, to put up with the control of a mistress, and Miss Caroline, if put out, can be pretty sharp and hasty. However, they were leaving, and I heard of it, and came after the place. Miss Caroline—dear! I mean Mrs. Castonel—thought I ought to look out for a superior one to hers, but she said she should be too glad to take me if *I* did not think so. So here I came, and here I have been; and when, a week ago, the girl under me misbehaved herself, I thought of you and spoke to mistress, so we sent for you. Now you know how it has all happened, Hannah."

"Yes, ma'am, and thank you. Is Miss Caroline well?"

"Mrs. Castonel," interrupted the housekeeper. "Did you not hear me correct myself? She is getting better."

"Has she been ill?" returned Hannah.

"Ill! I believe you. It was a near touch, Hannah, whether she lived or died."

"What has been the matter, Mrs. Muff?"

"Never you mind what," said the old lady somewhat sharply. "She has been ill, but is getting better, and that's enough for you. I'll step up, and ask if she wants anything."

Hannah cast her eyes round the kitchen; it looked a very comfortable one, and she thought she should be happy enough in her new abode. Everything was bright and clean to a fault, betokening two plain facts, the presiding

genius of Mrs. Muff, and plenty of work for Hannah, who knew she should have to keep things as she found them.

"Mrs. Castonel will have some tea presently, not just yet," said Mrs. Muff, returning. "How ill she does look. Her face has no more colour in it than a corpse. It put me in mind of my dream."

"Have you had a bad dream lately, ma'am?" inquired Hannah. For there was not a more inveterate dreamer, or interpreter of dreams, than Mrs. Muff, and nothing loth was she to find a listener for them.

"Indeed I have," she answered, "and a dream that I don't like. It was just three nights ago. I had gone to bed, dead asleep, having been up part of several back nights with my mistress, and I undressed in no time, and was asleep as quick. All on a sudden, for I remembered no event that seemed to lead to it, I thought I saw my old master—"

"The squire?" interrupted Hannah.

"Not the squire: what put him in your head? Mr. Winnington. I thought I saw him standing at the foot of the bed, and after looking at me fixedly, as if to draw my attention, he turned his head slowly towards the door. I heard the stairs creaking, as if somebody was coming up step by step, and we both kept our eyes on the door, waiting in expectation. It began to move on its hinges, very slowly, and I was struck with horror, for who should appear at it but——"

"An-a-a-a-h!" shrieked Hannah, whose feelings, being previously wrought up to shrieking pitch, received their climax, for at that very moment a loud noise was heard outside the kitchen door, which was only pushed to, not closed.

"What a simpleton you be!" wrathfully exclaimed Mrs. Muff, who, however, had edged her own chair into closer

contact with Hannah's. "I dare say it is only master in his laboratory."

After the lapse of a few reassuring seconds, Mrs. Muff moved towards the door, looked out, and then went towards a small room adjoining it.

"It is as I thought," she said, coming back and closing the door; "it is master in his laboratory. But now that's an odd thing," she added, musingly.

"What is odd, ma'am?"

"Why, how master could have come down and gone in there without my hearing him. I left him sitting with mistress. Perhaps she has dozed off; she does sometimes at dusk; and he crept down softly for fear of disturbing her."

"But what was the noise?" asked Hannah, breathlessly.

"Law, child! d'ye fear it was a ghost? It was only Mr. Castonel let fall one of the little drawers, and it went down with a clatter. And that's another odd thing, now I come to think of it, for I always believed that top drawer to be a dummy drawer. It has no lock and no knob, like the others."

"What is a dummy drawer?" repeated Hannah.

"A false drawer, child, one that won't open. John thinks so too, for last Saturday, when he was cleaning the laboratory, I went in for some string to tie up the beef olives I was making for dinner. He was on the steps, stretching up his duster to that very drawer, and he called out, 'This here drawer is just like your head, Madam Muff.'"

"'How so?' asked I.

"'Cause he has got nothing in the inside of him,' said he, in his impudent way, and rushed off the steps into the garden, fearing I should box his ears. But it is this very drawer master has now let fall, and there were two or three little papers and phials, I saw, scattered on the floor. I was stepping in, asking if I could help him to pick them

up, but he looked at me as black as thunder, and roared out, 'No. Go away and mind your own business.' Didn't you hear him?"

"I heard a man's voice," replied Hannah; "I did not know it was Mr. Castonel's. But about the dream, ma'am; you did not finish it."

"True, and it's worth finishing," answered the housekeeper, settling herself in her chair. "Where was I? 'Oh! —I thought at the foot of the bed stood Mr. Winnington, and when the foot-steps came close, and the door opened — so slowly, Hannah, and we watching in suspense all the time—who should it be but Mr. and Mrs. Castonel. She was in her grave-clothes, a flannel dress and cap, edged with white quilled ribbon, and she looked for all the world as she looks this night. He had got hold of her hand, and he handed her in, remaining himself at the door, and my old master bent forward and took her by the other hand. Mr. Winnington looked at me, as much as to say, Do you see this? and then they both turned and gazed after Mr. Castonel. I heard his footsteps descending the stairs, and upon looking again at the foot of the bed, they were both gone. I woke up in a dreadful fright, and could not get to sleep again for two hours."

"It's a mercy it wasn't me that dreamt it," observed Hannah. "I should have rose the house, screeching."

"It was a nasty dream," added Mrs. Muff, "and if mistress had not been out of all danger, and getting better as fast as she can get, I should say it betokened—something not over-pleasant."

She was interrupted by Mrs. Castonel's bell. It was for a cup of tea, and Mrs. Muff took it up. As she passed the laboratory, she saw that Mr. Castonel was in it still. Mrs. Castonel was seated in an arm-chair by her bedroom fire.

"Then you have not been asleep, ma'am?" observed

Mrs. Muff, perceiving that her mistress had the candles lighted and was reading.

"No, I have not felt sleepy this evening. Let Hannah come up when I ring next. I should like to see her."

Scarcely had Mrs. Muff regained the kitchen, when the bell rang again, so she sent up Hannah.

"Ah, Hannah, how d'ye do?" said Mrs. Castonel.

"I am nicely, thank you, miss — ma'am," answered Hannah, who did not stand in half the awe of "Miss Caroline" that she did of the formidable Mrs. Muff. "I am sorry to find you are not well, ma'am."

"I have been ill, but I am much better. So much better that I should have gone downstairs to-day, had it not been so damp and chilly."

Hannah never took her eyes off Mrs. Castonel as she spoke; she was thinking how very much she was changed; apart from her paleness and aspect of ill health. Her eyes appeared darker, and there was a look of care in them. She wore a cap, and her dark hair was nearly hidden beneath it.

"Now, Hannah," she said, "I hope you have made up your mind to do your work well, and help Mrs. Muff all that you can. There is a great deal more work to do here than there was at my uncle's."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Hannah.

"Especially in running up and downstairs you must save Mrs. Muff; your legs are younger than hers. Let me see that you do, and then I shall be pleased with you."

"I'll try," repeated Hannah. "Shall I take your cup for some more tea, ma'am?"

"I should like some," was Mrs. Castonel's reply, "but I don't know that I may have it. This morning Mr. Castonel said it was bad for me, and made me nervous, and he would not let me drink a second cup."

Hannah stood waiting, not knowing whether to take the cup or not.

"Is Mr. Castonel in his study?"

"If you please, ma'am, which place is that?"

"The front room on the left-hand side, opening opposite to the dining-room," said Mrs. Castonel.

"I don't think it is there then," replied Hannah. "He is in the little room where the bottles are, next the kitchen. I forget, ma'am, what Mrs. Muff called it."

"Oh, is he? Open the door, Hannah."

The girl obeyed, and Mrs. Castonel called to him. "Gervase!"

He heard her, and came immediately to the foot of the stairs. "What is it?" he asked.

"May I have another cup of tea?"

He ran upstairs and entered the room. "Have you taken your tea already?" he said, in accents of surprise and displeasure. "I told you to wait until seven o'clock."

"I was so thirsty. Do say I may have another cup, Gervase. I am sure it will not hurt me."

"Bring up half a cup," he said to the servant, "and some more bread-and-butter. If you drink, Caroline, you must eat."

Hannah went downstairs. She procured what was wanted and was carrying it from the kitchen again, when Mr. Castonel came out of the laboratory, to which it appeared he had returned.

"Give it me," he said to Hannah. "I will take it myself to your mistress."

So he proceeded upstairs with the little waiter, and Hannah returned to the kitchen. "How much she's altered!" was her exclamation, as she closed the door.

"What did she say to you?" questioned Mrs. Muff.

"Well, ma'am, she chief[illegible] told me to be attentive, and to

save your legs," returned Hannah. "I never [illegible] Caroline so thoughtful before. I thought it [illegible] her."

"And that has surprised me, that she should [illegible] much lately," assented Mrs. Muff. "Thoughtfulness does not come to the young suddenly. It's a thing that only comes with years—or sorrow."

"Sorrow!" echoed Hannah. "Miss Caroline can't have any sorrow."

"Not—not that I know of," somewhat dubiously responded the housekeeper.

"Is Mr. Castonel fond of her? Does he [illegible] good husband?" asked Hannah, full of woman's curiosity on such points.

"What should hinder him?" testily retorted Mrs. [illegible]

"Has that—that strange lady left the place?" [illegible] Hannah's next question. "She that, people said, had something to do with Mr. Castonel."

"What to do with him?" was the sharp [illegible]

"Was his cousin, ma'am, or sister-in-law, or some relation of that sort," explained Hannah, with a face demure enough to disarm the anger of the fastidious Mrs. Muff.

"I believe she has not left," was the stiff reply. "I know nothing about her."

"Do you suppose Miss Caroline does?" added [illegible]

"Of course she does, all particulars," replied Mrs. Muff, with a peculiar sniff, which she invariably gave when forcing her lips to an untruth. "But it's not your business, so you may just put it out of your head, and never think more about it. And you may begin and wash up the tea things. John don't deserve any tea for not coming in; I have a great mind to make him go without. He is always stopping in the street to play."

Hannah was rising to obey, when the bedroom bell rang

most violently, and Mr. Castonel was heard bursting out of the room, and calling loudly for assistance.

"Whatever can be the matter?" was the terrified exclamation of Mrs. Muff. "Mistress has never dropped asleep, and fallen off her chair into the fire! Follow me upstairs, girl. And that lazy tiger a playing truant!"

Not for many a year had the housekeeper flown upstairs so quickly. Hannah followed more slowly, from a vague consciousness of dread—of what she might see; the dream she had shuddered at, being before her mind in vivid colours. Mrs. Castonel was in convulsions.

About the same hour, or a little later, Mr. Leicester returned to his home, having been absent since morning. "Well," he cheerily said, as he took his seat by the fire, "have you any news? A whole day from the parish seems a long absence to me."

"I think not," answered Mrs. Leicester. "Except that I went to see Caroline Castonel to-day, and she is getting on well."

"I am glad to hear it. Is she quite out of danger?"

"Completely so."

"She told mamma that she should be at church on Sunday," added Ellen.

"Yes, but I told her that would be imprudent," returned Mrs. Leicester. "However, she will soon be well now."

At that moment the church bell rang out with its three times two, denoting the recent departure of a soul. The church, situated at the end of the village street, was immediately opposite the parsonage, the main road dividing them. The sound struck upon their ears loud and full; very solemnly in the stillness of the winter's night.

Consternation fell upon all. No one was ill in the village—at least, ill enough for death. Could a sister—for

they knew, by the strokes, it was not a male—have been called away suddenly?

"The passing-bell!" uttered the rector, rising from his seat in agitation. "And I to have been absent! Have I been summoned out?" he hurriedly asked of Mrs. Leicester.

"No; I assure you, no. Not any one has been for you. Neither have we heard of any illness."

Mr. Leicester touched the bell-rope at his elbow. A maid-servant answered it. Benjamin was attending to his horse. "Step over," said the rector, "and inquire who is dead."

She departed. A couple of minutes at the most would see her back again. They had all risen from their seats, and stood in an expecting, almost a reverent attitude. The bell was striking out quickly now. The girl returned, looking terrified.

"It is the passing-bell, sir, for Mrs. Castonel!"

The morning was cold and misty, and the Reverend Christopher Leicester felt a strange chill and depression of spirits, for which he could not account, when he stepped into the chariot that was to convey him to Mr. Castonel's.

Mrs. Chavasse and Frances came into the parsonage. Ostensibly for the purpose of inviting Ellen to spend the following day with them: in reality to see the funeral. They had not long to wait.

The undertaker came first in hatband and scarf, and then the black chariot containing the Reverend Mr. Leicester. Before the hearse walked six carriers, and the mourning-coach came last. It was a plain, quiet funeral.

It drew up at the churchyard-gate, in full view of the parsonage windows, all of which had their blinds closely drawn. But they managed to peep behind the blinds.

The rector stepped out first, and stood waiting at the

church door in his officiating dress, his book open in his hands. There was some little delay in getting the burden from the hearse, but at length the carriers had it on their shoulders, and bore it up the path with measured, even steps, themselves nearly hidden by the pall. Mr. Castonel followed, his handkerchief to his face. He betrayed at that moment no outward sign of emotion, but his face could not have been exceeded in whiteness by that of his dead wife.

"Oh!" said Ellen, shivering, and turning from the light, as she burst into tears, "what a dreadful sequel it is to the day when he last got out of a carriage at the churchyard-gate, and she was with him, in her gay happiness! Poor Mr. Castonel, how he must need consolation!"

"It is nothing of a funeral, after all," said Mrs. Chavasse, discontentedly; "no pall-bearers, no mutes, no anything. I wonder he did not have a little more fuss and ceremony!"

CHAPTER III.

ELLEN LEICESTER.

THE hot day had nearly passed, and the sun, approaching its setting, threw the lengthening shade of the trees across the garden of Mrs. Chavasse. The large window of a pleasant room opened on to it; and in this room stood a fair, graceful girl, with one of the loveliest faces ever seen in Ebury. Her dark blue eyes were bent on the ground: as well they might be; the rose of her cheek had deepened to crimson, as well it might do; for a gentleman's arm had fondly encircled her waist, and his lips had pushed aside the cluster of soft hair, and were rendering that damask still deeper. Alas that her whole attitude, as she stood there, should tell of such rapturous happiness!

Neither was an inhabitant of that house; both had come in to pay an evening visit, and the young lady had thrown off her bonnet and mantle. It may be that these visits were accidental; but, if so, they took place nearly every evening. It happened that Mrs. and Miss Chavasse on this occasion were out, but were expected to enter every minute; so, being alone, they were improving the time.

And this from Miss Leicester, the carefully brought-up daughter of the Rector of Ebury? That she should repose quietly in the embrace of that man without attempting to withdraw from it! Yes; and *love* has caused many to do as much. But oh, that the deep, ardent affection, of which

Ellen Leicester was so eminently capable, had been directed into any other channel than the one it had irrevocably entered upon!

For he who stood beside her was Gervase Castonel. It was not that he had once been married, but it was that there were some who deemed him a bad man, a mysterious man, with his sinister expression of face, when he did not care to check it, and his covert ways. Why should he have cast his coils round Ellen Leicester? why have striven to gain *her* love, when there were so many others whose welcome to him would have carried with it no alloy? It would almost seem that Mr Castonel went by the rules of contrary, as the children say in their play. The only persons into whose houses he had not been received, and who had both taken so strange and unconquerable a dislike to him, were the late Mr. Winnington and the Reverend Christopher Leicester. Yet he had chosen his first wife in the niece of the first, and it seemed likely (to us who are in the secret) that he was seeking a second in the daughter of the latter. Strange that he should have been able to do his work so effectually; that Ellen Leicester, so good and dutiful, should have been won over to a passion for him little short of infatuation, and that it should have been kept so secret from the whole world! Never was there a man who could go more mysteriously to work than Gervase Castonel.

"You speak of a second marriage, Ellen, my love," he was saying, "but how often have I told you that this scarcely applies to me. Were it that I had lived with her years of happiness, or that I had loved her, then your objections might have reason. I repeat to you, however much you may despise me for it, that I married her, caring only for you. Before I was awake to my own sensations, I had gone too far to retract; I had asked for her of old Winnington, and in honour I was obliged to keep to my hasty

engagement. Even in our early marriage days, I knew that I loved but you; sleeping or waking, it was you who were present to me. Oh, Ellen! you may disbelieve and refuse to love me, but in mercy say it not."

There was honey in the words of Mr. Castonel, there was greater honey in his tones, and Ellen Leicester's heart beat more rapidly within her. *She* disbelieve aught asserted by him!

"Ellen, you judge wrongly," was his reply, as she whispered something in his ear. "It *is* a duty sometimes to leave father and mother."

"But not disobediently, not wilfully. And I know that they would never consent. You know it also, Gervase."

"My darling Ellen, this is nonsense. Suppose I were to yield to your scruples, and marry another in my anger? What then, Ellen?"

"I think it would kill me!" she murmured.

"And because Mr. and Mrs. Leicester have taken an unjust prejudice against me, both our lives are to be rendered miserable! Would that be justice? Suppose you were my wife; do suppose it, only for a moment, Ellen; suppose that we were irrevocably united, we should then not have consent to ask, but forgiveness."

She looked earnestly at him, and as his true meaning came across her, the mild expression of her deep blue eyes gave place to terror.

"Oh, Gervase," she implored, clasping his arm in agitation, "never say that again! As you value my peace here and hereafter, do not tempt me to disobedience. I mistook your meaning, did I not?" she continued, in rapid tones of terror. "Gervase, I say, did I not mistake you?"

He felt that he had been too hasty: the right time had not come. But it would come, for never did Gervase Castonel set his will upon a thing that he left unfulfilled.

Miss Chavasse entered. Ellen Leicester was in the garden then: she had glided out on hearing her approach. And Mr. Castonel was seated back in an armchair, intent upon a newspaper.

"Oh," exclaimed Frances, "I am sorry we should have been out. I am sure we are obliged to you for waiting for us, Mr. Castonel."

"I have not waited long: but if I had waited the whole evening I should be amply repaid now." He spoke softly and impressively, as he detained her hand in his: and from his manner, then, it might well have been thought that he intended Frances Chavasse for his wife; at least, it never could have been believed that he was so ardently pursuing another.

"And Ellen Leicester is here!" added Frances; "for that's her bonnet. Have you seen her?"

"Who? Miss Leicester? Yes, I believe I did see her. But I was so engaged with this paper. Here is some interesting medical evidence in it."

"Is there?" But at that moment Ellen Leicester came to the window. "How long have you been here?" asked Frances.

"About an hour," was Miss Leicester's answer.

"What an awful girl for truth that is!" was the angry mental comment of Mr. Castonel.

"I must say you have proved yourselves sociable companions," remarked Frances. "You mope in the garden, Ellen, and Mr. Castonel bores over an old newspaper! Let us have a song."

Now Mr. Castonel hated singing, but Frances sat down to the piano, and he was pleased to stand behind her and clasp the hand of Ellen Leicester. Yet Frances, had she been asked, would have said Mr. Castonel's attention was given to herself; ay, and gloried in saying it, for she liked

the man, and would have had no objection to becoming his second wife. It may be that she was scheming for it. Thus they remained until the night came on, and the moon was up. Frances, never tired of displaying her rich voice, and Ellen Leicester content to stand by his side, had the standing lasted for ever. Moonlight music and meetings are dangerous things.

A servant came for Ellen Leicester, and Mr. Castonel walked home with her. They went not the front way, but through the lane, which brought them to the back-door of the rectory. Was it that Ellen shrank from going openly, lest her parents might see from the windows that Mr. Castonel was her companion? He lingered with her for a few moments at the gate, and when she entered she found her mother alone: the rector was out. To her it had been a delicious walk, and she felt that life would be indeed a blank, if not shared with Gervase Castonel.

Ellen had been invited to spend the next evening with Miss Chavasse, as was a frequent occurrence, and it was chiefly in these evening meetings that her love had grown up and ripened. Mr. Castonel was ever a welcome visitor to Mrs. Chavasse, and Frances had laughed, and talked, and flirted with him, until a warmer feeling had arisen in her heart. He had all the practice of Ebury, being its only resident medical man, so in a pecuniary point of view he was a desirable match for Frances. Little deemed they that Ellen Leicester was his attraction. A tacit sort of rivalry with Ellen existed in the mind of Frances: she thought of her as a rival in beauty, a rival in position, a rival in the favour of Ebury. But she was really fond of Ellen, always anxious to have her by her side, and it never once entered into her brain that Mr. Castonel, who was under cold displeasure at the rectory, should seek the favour of Ellen.

Again went Ellen that evening to the house of Mrs.

Chavasse, and again went Mr. Castonel. They, the three, passed it in the garden, a large rambling place, nearly as full of weeds as of flowers. They roamed about the different walks, they sat on the benches; Mr. Castonel's attention being given chiefly to Frances, not to Ellen, his custom when with both. Frances possessed her mother's old talent for flirtation, and Mr. Castonel was nothing loth to exercise it. And so the evening passed, and the summer moon rose in its course.

"Oh!" suddenly cried Frances, as they were returning to the house, "I have forgotten the bay-leaves mamma told me to gather. Now I must go back all down to the end of the garden."

She probably thought Mr. Castonel would follow her. He did not do so. He turned to Ellen Leicester, and drawing her amongst the sheltering trees, clasped her to him.

"I shall wish you good night now, my darling," he murmured, "this moment is too precious to be lost. Oh, Ellen! are things to go on like this for ever? It is true these evening meetings are a consolation to us, for they are spent in the presence of each other, but the hours which ought to be yours, and yours only, are thrown away in idle nonsense with Frances Chavasse. Oh, that we had indeed a right to be together and alone! When is that time to come?—*for come it must, Ellen.* When two people love as we do, and no justifiable impediment exists to its being legally ratified, that ratification will take place sooner or later. Think of this," he murmured, reluctantly releasing her as the steps of Miss Chavasse were heard drawing near.

"I expected you were in the house by this time," she exclaimed breathlessly, "and you are only where I left you."

"We waited for you," said Mr. Castonel.

"Very considerate of you!" was the reply of Frances,

spoken in a tone of pique. She *had* expected Mr. Castonel to follow her.

They walked on towards the house, Mr. Castonel giving his arm to Frances. Talking was heard in the drawing-room, and they recognized the voice of Mr. Leicester.

"I will go round here," said Mr. Castonel, indicating a path which led to a side gate. "If I enter, they will keep me talking; and I have a patient to see."

He extended a hand to each, as he spoke, by way of farewell, but Frances turned along the path with him. Ellen sat down on a garden-chair and waited. The voices from the house came distinctly to her ear in the quiet night.

"They will be in directly," Mrs. Chavasse was saying. "Mr. Castonel is with them. He and Frances grow greater friends than ever."

"Beware of that friendship," interrupted Mr. Leicester. "It may lead to something more."

"What if it should?" asked Mrs. Chavasse.

The rector paused, as if in surprise. "Do I understand you rightly, Mrs. Chavasse—that you would suffer Frances to become his wife?"

"Who is going to marry Frances?" inquired Mr. Chavasse, entering, and hearing the last words.

"Nobody," answered his wife. "We were speculating on Mr. Castonel's attention to her becoming more pointed. I'm sure any one might be proud to have him: he must be making a large income."

"My objection to Mr. Castonel is to his character," returned the clergyman. "He is a bad man, living an irregular life. The world may call it gallantry: I call it sin."

"You allude to that mysterious girl who followed him down here," said Mrs. Chavasse. "You know what he told Mr. Winnington—that it was a relation, a lady of family

and character. Of course it is singular, her living on here in the way she does, but it may be quite right, for all that."

"I saw him stealing off there last night, as I came home," observed the rector. "But I do not allude only to that. There are other things I could tell you of: some that happened during the lifetime of his wife."

"Then I tell you what," interrupted Mr. Chavasse, in his bluff, hearty manner, "a man of that sort should never have a daughter of mine. So mind what you and Frances are about, Mrs. Chavasse."

"That's just like papa," whispered Frances, who had returned to Ellen Leicester. "Speaking fiercely one minute, eating his words the next. Mamma always turns him round her little finger."

"As you value your daughter's happiness, keep her from Mr. Castonel," resumed the clergyman. "I doubt him in more ways than one."

"Do listen to your papa, Ellen," again whispered Frances. "How prejudiced he is against Mr. Castonel."

"My dear father is prejudiced against him," was Ellen's thought. "He says he met him stealing off to her house last night—if he only knew that he was stealing back from taking me home!"

Ellen was mistaken. It was later in the evening that the rector had met Mr. Castonel.

"Must I give him up!" she went on, in mental anguish. "It will cost me the greatest of all earthly misery: perhaps even my life. But I cannot have the curse of disobedience on my soul. I must, I *will* give him up."

Ah, Ellen Leicester! you little know how such good resolutions fail when *one* is present with you to combat them! However, cherish your intention for the present, if you will. It will come to the same in the end.

"Ellen," Frances continued to whisper, "what is it that

prejudices your papa against Mr. Castonel? Caroline told me herself, after her marriage, that that person was a relative of his, one almost like a sister. You heard her say so."

Ellen Leicester did not answer, and Frances turned towards her. It may have been the effect of the moonlight, but her face looked cold and white as the snow in winter.

It was a fine evening in October. Mr. Castonel had dined, and the tiger lighted the lamp and placed it, with the port wine, on the table before him. Mr. Castonel was particularly fond of a glass of good port; but he let it remain untouched on this day, for he was buried in thought. He was a slight-made man, neither handsome nor plain, and his unfathomable grey eyes never looked you in the face. He rang the bell, and the tiger answered it.

"Send Mrs. Muff to me. And, John, don't leave the house. I shall want you."

The housekeeper came in, closed the door, and came towards him. He was then pouring out his first glass of wine.

"Muff," he began, "there's a small, black portmanteau somewhere about the house. A hand-portmanteau."

"Yes, sir. It is in the closet by John's room."

"Get it out, and put a week's change of linen into it. Did the tailor send home some new clothes to-day?"

"He did, sir, and I ordered Hannah to take them upstairs."

"They must be put in. And my shaving-tackle, and such things. I am going out for a few days."

Mrs. Muff was thunderstruck. She had never known Mr. Castonel to leave Ebury since he had settled in it, excepting on the occasion of his marriage.

"You have given me a surprise, sir," she said, "but I'll see to the things. Do you want them for to-morrow?"

"For this evening."

Mrs. Muff thought her ears must have deceived her. The last coach for the distant railway station had left. Besides, she had heard Mr. Castonel make an appointment in Ebury for the following day at twelve. "*This* evening, sir!" she repeated. "The coaches have all gone. The last drove by as John was bringing out the dinner-tray."

"For this evening," repeated Mr. Castonel, without further comment. "In half an hour's time. And, Muff, you must get the house cleaned and put thoroughly in order whilst I am away. Let the dressing-room adjoining my bed-chamber be made ready for use, the scent-bottles and trumpery put on the dressing-table, as it was in—in the time of Mrs. Castonel."

This was the climax. Mrs. Muff's speech failed her.

"This is Tuesday. I intend to be home on Monday next. I shall probably bring a—a person—a companion home with me."

"A what, sir?" demanded Mrs. Muff.

"A friend will accompany me, I say."

"Very well, sir. Which room shall I get ready?"

"Room! What for?"

Mrs. Muff was growing bewildered. "I thought you said a gentleman was returning with you, sir. I asked which bed-chamber I should prepare for him."

"My own."

"Certainly, sir," answered the housekeeper, hesitatingly. "And in that case, which room shall I prepare for you?"

Mr. Castonel laughed; such a strange laugh. "I will tell you then," he replied. "You must also send for the gardener, and get the garden done up. Send to-morrow morning, and let him begin. John can help him: he will not have much to do whilst I am away."

"Except mischief," added the housekeeper. "I'll keep him to it, sir."

"And, Muff, if any one comes after me to-night, no matter who, or how late, say I have gone to an urgent case in the country, and send them to Mr. Rice. You remember, now, *no matter who*. You may tell the whole town to-morrow, and the deuce besides, for all it can signify then."

"Tell what, sir?"

"That I have gone out for a week's holiday."

Mrs. Muff withdrew, utterly stupefied. She thought that she was beside herself, or that Mr. Castonel was.

That same evening, not very long after the above interview, Ellen Leicester, attended by a maid, left her home, for she had promised to take tea with Mrs. Chavasse. In passing a lonely part of the road, where the way branched off to the railroad, they came upon Mr. Castonel. He shook hands with Miss Leicester, and gave her his arm, saying that he was also bound for Mrs. Chavasse's. "I will take charge of you now," he added; "you need not trouble your maid to come any further."

"Very true," murmured Ellen.—"Martha," she said, turning to the servant, "if you would like two or three hours to yourself to-night, you may have them. Perhaps you would like to go home and see your mother."

The girl thanked her, and departed cheerfully towards the village. Could she have peered beyond a turning in the way, she might have seen a post-carriage drawn up, evidently waiting for travellers.

The time went on to nine. The rector and his wife sat over the fire, the former shivering, for he had caught a violent cold. "I suppose you have some nitre in the house?" he suddenly observed.

"Really—I fear not," answered Mrs. Leicester. "But I can send for some. Will you touch the bell?"

"Is Benjamin in?" demanded Mrs. Leicester of the maid who answered it.

"No, ma'am. Master said he was to go and see how Thomas Shipley was, and he is gone."

"Then tell Martha to put her bonnet on. She must fetch some nitre."

"Martha is not come in, ma'am, since she went out to take Miss Leicester."

"No!" uttered Mrs. Leicester, in surprise. "Why, that was at six o'clock. I wonder what is detaining her?"

Benjamin came in, and was sent for the nitre, and soon Martha's voice was heard in the kitchen. Mrs. Leicester ordered her in.

"Martha, what do you mean by staying out without leave?"

"Betsy has been on at me about it in the kitchen," was the girl's reply. "But it is Miss Ellen's fault, ma'am. She told me I might have a few hours for myself."

"When did she tell you that?" demanded Mrs. Leicest doubting if Ellen had said it.

"When we came to Piebald-corner, ma'am. Mr. Castonel was standing there, and he said he would see Miss Ellen safe to Mrs. Chavasse's, and it was then she told me."

The rector looked up, anger on his face.

"Did you leave her with Mr. Castonel?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Then understand, Martha, for the future. If you go out to attend Miss Leicester, *you are to attend her*. You have done wrong. It is not seemly for Miss Leicester to be abroad in the evening without one of her own attendants."

"Now this has finished it," he continued, to his wife, as the girl withdrew. "Ellen shall not go there again unless you are with her. Mr. Castonel! How dared he? I would rather Ellen made a companion of the poorest and

lowest person in the village. And should there be any engagement growing up between him and Frances, I will not have Ellen there to countenance it with her presence."

"Poor Mr. Winnington prejudiced you against Mr. Castonel," observed Mrs. Leicester. "I do not admire or like him, but I think less ill of him than you do. Perhaps Frances might do worse."

The clergyman turned his head and looked at her. "I will ask you a home question, Susan. Would you care to see him marry Ellen?"

"Oh no, no!" and Mrs. Leicester almost shuddered as she spoke. "Not for worlds!"

"Yet you would see him the husband of Frances Chavasse; your early friend's child!"

Mrs. Leicester hesitated before she spoke. "It is that I hope to see Ellen the wife of a religious man, a good man, and I fear Mrs. Chavasse does not consider that for Frances. She thinks of social fitness, of position, of Mr. Castonel's being in favour with the world. But Ellen—no, no, I trust never to see her the wife of such a man as Mr. Castonel."

The minister covered his face with his hands. "I would rather read the burial service over her."

When Benjamin returned, he was despatched for Miss Leicester, and told to hasten. But he came back and said Miss Leicester was not there.

"Not there!" exclaimed the rector. "Why, where have you been for her? I told you to go to Mrs. Chavasse's."

"That's where I have been, sir."

"Then you have made some stupid blunder. She must be there."

"I don't think I made any blunder, sir," returned Benjamin, who was a simple-speaking man of forty. "When I told 'em I had come for Miss Ellen, one of their maids

joked and said then I had come to the wrong house, but she took in the message, and Mrs. Chavasse came out to me. She said as they had expected Miss Ellen to tea, and waited for her, but she did not come."

Nothing could exceed the indignation of the rector. Where was Ellen? Where could she be gone? Was it possible that Mr. Castonel had persuaded her to go visiting anywhere else? In spite of his wife's remonstrances, who assured him he was too ill to venture forth, and would catch his death, he turned out in search of her; and Mrs. Leicester, worried and angry, laid all the blame upon Martha, who immediately began to cry her eyes out.

Before noon the next day, Ebury was ringing with the elopement of Mr. Castonel and Ellen Leicester.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND MRS. CASTONEL.

Mr. and Mrs. Castonel returned to Ebury, and the whole place flocked to pay them the wedding visit. The disobedience of Ellen Leicester was no business of theirs, that they should mark their sense of it. And Ellen—had it not been for the recollection of her offended parents and the unjustifiable part she had acted—how supreme, how intense would have been her happiness! Her whole existence lay in her husband; she could see no fault in him; and could they then have tasted of the Tree of Life, so that the present might be for ever, she might have given up all wish of a hereafter. Amongst the visitors went Mrs. and Miss Chavasse; and, whatever mortification might have been in their hearts, it was not suffered to appear; that would never have done. So Mrs. Chavasse contented herself [illegible] elsewhere, the somewhat faded furniture, and [illegible]g fate that *her* daughter had not been taken to a [illegible]o carelessly appointed.

[illegible]ths went by, and how felt Ellen Castonel? Why, [illegible]its of her conduct were beginning to come home to She had received the forgiveness of her parents, for [illegible]she went to them in prayer and penitence, and knelt [illegible] father's feet, the minister, though he strove hard to [illegible] her away, according to his resolution, yet he was [illegible]bled in health, enfeebled by sorrow, and it ended in [illegible]alling on her neck with sobs of agony, and forgiving

her. It had been well could he as easily have forgotten. In these few months he had become a bowed, broken man. His hair had changed from brown to grey, and it was rumoured that he had never since enjoyed a whole night's rest. Could this fail to tell on Ellen? who, excepting that one strange and unaccountable act, had always been a gentle, loving, obedient daughter. She watched it all, and knew that it had been her work. Moreover, there were arising, within her, doubts of Mr. Castonel—whether he was the idol she had taken him to be. She was also in bad health, and suffered much. She looked worn, haggard, wretched: curious comments on which went about Ebury; and the people all agreed that Mrs. Castonel did not seem to repose on a bed of roses.

"There's a row upstairs," exclaimed the tiger to Hannah, one day in April. "Missis is sobbing and crying buckets full, and master has been a blowing of her up."

"How do you know? Where are they?" said Hannah.

"In the drawing-room. I went up to ask what medi[illegible] was to go out, but they were too busy to see me. I h[illegible] master a roaring as I went up the stairs, like he roar[illegible] ne day, and nearly frightened my skin off me. I [illegible] e said ing about missis going so much to the parso[illegible] lying on t it was her duty, and he said it wasn't. She[illegible]

"I think a sofa, a sobbing and moaning awful."

"For shame of you must have peeped in," cried Ha[illegible]

"In course I d you!"

say not! Master w d. Wouldn't you? Oh dear no, I[illegible] and asking her to forge kneeling down then, a kissing o[illegible] to get herself calm, for that what he'd said in his passion[illegible] And he vowed, if she'd only it would do her unknown h[illegible] hisself to the parsonage this e op crying, that he'd tak[illegible] of it with her——"

ning, and stop the v[illegible]

"What is that you are saying?" sharply demanded Mrs. Muff, putting her head into the kitchen.

"I was a telling Hannah she'd best sew that there button on my best livery trousers, what came off 'em last Sunday, or she'd get her neck wrung," answered the lad, vaulting away.

Whether the tiger's information was correct, and that excitement was likely to have an injurious effect upon Mrs. Castonel, certain it is, that the following day she was seized with illness. The nature of it was such as to destroy the hope that had sprung up in her heart, and precisely similar to that which had preceded the death of the first Mrs. Castonel.

"What an extraordinary thing!" cried Mrs. Chavasse, when the news reached her; "it looks like fatality. Caroline had been six months married when she fell ill; and now, in like manner, Ellen falls ill! I hope she will not follow her fate out to the last, and die of it."

"For the matter of that, we never knew what the first Mrs. Castonel did die of," returned Mrs. Major Acre, who was sitting there. "She was recovering from her sickness; indeed, it may be said that she had recovered from it; and she went off suddenly one evening, nobody knew with what."

"Mr. Castonel said it was perfectly satisfactory to medical men," said Mrs. Chavasse. "There are so many dangerous tricks and turns of maladies, you know, only clear to themselves."

For several days Ellen Castonel was very ill. Not, perhaps, in absolute danger, but sufficiently near it to excite apprehension. Then she began to get better. During this time nothing could exceed the affection and kindness of Mr. Castonel; his attention was a marvel of admiration, allowed to be so, even by Mrs. Leicester.

One afternoon, when he was dressed and in the drawing-room, Mrs. and Miss Chavasse called. They were the first

visitors who had been admitted. Frances offered to remain the rest of the day, but Mrs. Chavasse overruled it; Ellen was not strong enough, she said, to bear so many hours' incessant gossiping.

Mr. Castonel came in whilst they sat there. He was in high spirits, laughed and talked, almost flirted with Frances, as in former days, when she had erroneously deemed he had a motive in it. When they left, he attended them to the door, gay and attractive as ever in the eyes of Frances; and she pondered how Ellen could ever appear sad with such a husband. Mr. Castonel then went into his laboratory, where he buried himself for half an hour. When he returned up-stairs, Ellen was in tears.

"Don't be angry with me, Gervase. This depression of spirits will come on, and I cannot help it. I fear it is a bad omen."

Mr. Castonel turned away his head and coughed.

"An omen of what, Ellen?"

"That I shall never recover."

"You have recovered. Come, come, Ellen, cheer up. I thought Mrs. Chavasse's visit had done you good."

"Last evening, when I sat alone for so many hours, I could not help thinking of poor Caroline. I wondered what it could be she died of, and——"

"Ellen!" burst forth Mr. Castonel, "it is wrong and wicked to encourage such absurd thoughts. You asked me the other day, when you were lying ill, what it was she died of, and I explained it. It is not going to occur to you."

"No, no," she answered, "I am not really afraid. It is only in the quiet evening hours, when I am alone, that I get these foolish fancies. If you could be always with me, they would not come. Try and stay with me to-night, Gervase."

"My darling, I have not left you one evening since you

were ill until the last, and then it was not by choice. I know of nothing to call me forth to-night. Should anything arise unexpectedly, I must go, as Rice is away. In that case, I should tell Muff to remain with you."

She still wept silently. It seemed that her spirits had sunk into a terribly depressed state, and nothing, just then, could arouse them. Mr. Castonel stood and looked down at her, his elbow leaning on the mantelpiece.

"Would you like Mr. and Mrs. Leicester to come this evening?" he asked.

"Oh!" she cried, clasping her hands and half rising from her chair, the pallid hue giving place to crimson on her lovely face, and the light of excitement rising in her sweet blue eyes—"oh, Gervase, if you would only ask them? Papa has never been here to remain an evening with me: she would come now. It would do me more good than everything else. Indeed, I should not have these fears then."

He went to a table and wrote a brief note, putting it into Ellen's hands to read. It was to the effect that his wife was in low spirits, and much wished them both to come to tea and spend the evening with her.

"Thank you, thank you, dearest Gervase," she exclaimed, "you have made me so happy. Oh, papa!"

"Ellen," he said, gazing into her eyes, "confess. You love your father better than you do me."

"You know the contrary, Gervase. I love him with a different love. I left him for you," she added, in low, almost reproachful tones, as she leaned forward and hid her face upon her husband's arm, "and people say that it is killing him."

The tiger was despatched with the note to the parsonage, and brought back a verbal answer that Mr. and Mrs. Leicester would soon follow him.

They both came. They sat with Ellen and her husband.

Mrs. Leicester made tea; and for once Ellen was happy. There appeared to be more sociable feeling between her husband and father than she had ever hoped for, and a joyous vision flitted across her of time bringing about a thorough reconciliation, and of their all being happy together. She laughed, she talked, she almost sang; and Mr. and Mrs. Leicester inquired what had become of the depression spoken of in Mr. Castonel's note. He answered pleasantly that their presence had scared it away, and that if they did not mind the trouble of coming out, it might be well to try the experiment again on the following evening; he could see it was the best medicine for his dearest Ellen. They promised to do so, even Mr. Leicester. Especially, he added, as he must leave almost directly.

The glow on Ellen's face faded. "Why leave, papa?"

"My dear, there is a vestry meeting to-night, and I must attend it. Your mamma can remain."

"Will you not return when it is over?" resumed Ellen, anxiously.

"No. It will not be over until late. It is likely to be a stormy one."

"But you *will* come to-morrow? And remain longer?" she feverishly added.

"Child, I have said so."

"Upon one condition—that she does not excite herself over it," interposed Mr. Castonel, affectionately laying his hand upon his wife's. "Add that proviso, sir."

"Oh, if Ellen is to excite herself, of course that would stop it," returned the rector, with a smile. The first smile his countenance had worn since her disobedience.

Ellen saw it, and her heart rose up in thankfulness within her. "Dearest papa," she whispered, leaning towards him, "I will be quite calm. It will be right in time between us all: I see it will. I am so happy!"

At seven o'clock they heard the little bell tinkle out, calling together the members of the select vestry; and Mr. Leicester took his departure. His wife remained with Ellen, Mr. Castonel also; nothing called him out; and they spent a happy, cordial evening together. When she rose to leave, Mr. Castonel rang the bell for Mrs. Muff to attend her. He would not leave Ellen.

"What nonsense!" said Mrs. Leicester. "As if any one would run away with me! I shall be at home in five minutes. I need not trouble Mrs. Muff."

"It will do Muff good," said Ellen. "She has never stirred out since my illness. And then, mamma, she can bring back the receipt you spoke of."

"Good night, my dear," said Mrs. Leicester, stooping to kiss her. "Do you feel better for our visit?"

"I feel quite well, mamma," was Ellen's joyful answer. "Nothing whatever is the matter with me now. Only," she added, laughing, "that I am a little thirsty."

"That is soon remedied," said Mr. Castonel. "I will bring you some wine and water, Ellen."

"How thankful I am to see your mistress so much better," exclaimed Mrs. Leicester, as she and Mrs. Muff walked along.

"Ma'am, you cannot be more thankful than I am. I have been upon thorns ever since she was taken ill. Poor Mrs. Castonel—I mean Miss Caroline—having been cut off suddenly by the same illness, was enough to make me fearful."

"Poor Caroline!" sighed Mrs. Leicester, with more truth than caution. "I wish she had lived."

"She is better off," was the reply of the housekeeper. "There is nothing but crosses and cares for us who are left. I hope, ma'am, you and Mr. Leicester will come in often now. You can have no conception of the effect it

has had upon my mistress to-night: she is a thousand pounds nearer being well."

Mrs. Leicester turned to her. "Do you think Mr. Castonel makes her a good husband? You and I, Mrs. Muff," she added, in tones which seemed to bespeak apology for herself, "knew each other years before this stranger ever came near the place, and I speak to you as I would not to others. He seems affectionate, kind, but—what do you think?"

"I cannot answer you, ma'am," replied Mrs. Muff, "I wish I could. Before us he is all kindness to her; and yet—I don't know why it should be, but I have my doubts of its being sincere. I force the feeling down, and say to myself that I was set against Mr. Castonel at the first, through the injury he did my old master. I had my doubts in the same way of his sincerity to his first wife. And yet, I don't notice it in his manners to other people."

"Does he go to see that—person now?" asked Mrs. Leicester, lowering her voice.

"Well, ma'am, I can't say. All I know is, that the other—servant or whatever she may be—who lives with her, was at our house lately."

"Indeed!"

"It was a night or two before my mistress was taken ill. There came a quiet knock at the door. John was out, and Hannah was upstairs, turning down the beds, so I answered it myself. She asked for Mr. Castonel. I did not know her in the dusk, and was about to show her into the study, where master sees his patients, but it flashed over me who it was; and I said Mr. Castonel was not at liberty, and shut the door in her face."

"Was Mr. Castonel at home?"

He was in the drawing-room with my mistress. And I

believe must have seen her from the windows, for he came downstairs almost directly, and went out."

"Did Ellen—did Mrs. Castonel see her!" breathlessly inquired Mrs. Leicester.

"Ma'am, I have my doubts she did. No sooner was Mr. Castonel gone, than the drawing-room bell rang, and I went up. It was for the lamp. While I was lighting it, my mistress said, 'Muff, who was that at the door?'

"That put me in a flutter, but I gathered my wits together, and answered that it was a person from the new shop—for of course I would not tell her the truth."

"'What did they want?' asked my mistress.

"'Brought the bill, ma'am,' said I. For luckily the new people had sent in their bill that day. And I took it out of my pocket, and laid it on the table by her.

"'What could the person want, walking before the house afterwards, and looking up at the windows?' then questioned my mistress.

"'Quite impossible for me to tell, ma'am,' I said; and I won't deny that the question took me aback. 'Perhaps they wanted a little fresh air, as it's a warmish night, and the street is open just here?'"

"Was that all that passed?" demanded Mrs. Leicester.

"That was all. Mr. Castonel was not in for two hours afterwards, and I heard him tell my mistress he had been out to a most difficult case. I'll be whipped if I believed him."

"Is he out much in an evening?"

"Very often, he used to be, before my mistress was taken ill. He is always ready with an excuse—it's this patient, or it's that patient, that wants him and keeps him. But I never remember Mr. Winnington to have had these evening calls upon his time."

They reached the parsonage, and entered it. The house-

keeper was to take back the receipt for some particularly nourishing jelly, which Mrs. Leicester had been recommending for Ellen. It was not immediately found, and Mrs. Muff sat with her in the parlour, talking still. The rector came in from the vestry meeting, and she rose to leave.

Conscious that she had remained longer than was absolutely needful, Mrs. Muff walked briskly homeward. She had gained the door, and was feeling in her pocket for the latch-key—she possessing one, and Mr. Castonel the other—when the door was flung violently open, and the tiger sprang out, for all the world like a real tiger, very nearly upsetting Mrs. Muff, and sending her backwards down the steps.

"You audacious, good-for-nothing monkey!" she exclaimed, giving him a smart box on the ears. "You saw me standing there, I suppose, and did it for the purpose."

"Did I do it for the purpose?" retorted John. "You just go in and see whether I did it for the purpose. I'm a-going to get the horse, and tear off without saddle or briddle for the first doctor I can fetch. It's like as if Mr. Rice had took his two days' holiday just now, a purpose not to be in the town!"

He rushed round towards the stables, and Mrs. Muff entered. Hannah met her with a shriek and a face as white as ashes. "Mrs. Castonel—oh, Mrs. Castonel!" was all she cried.

"What is it?" asked the terrified Mrs. Muff.

"It is spasms, or convulsions, or something of the sort," sobbed Hannah; "but I'm sure she's dying! She's taken just as Miss Caroline was. I am sure she is dying!"

Once more, as connected with this history, rang out the passing-bell of Ebury. And when the startled inhabitants—those who were late sitters-up—opened their doors and

strove to learn who had gone to their reckoning, they shrank from the answer with horror and dismay.

"The young, the beautiful, the second Mrs. Castonel!"

And again a funeral started from the house of the surgeon to take its way to the church. But this time it was a stranger who occupied the clergyman's chariot. Mr. Leicester's task was a more painful one; he followed as second mourner. Many people were in the churchyard, and their curiosity was intensely gratified at witnessing the violent grief of Mr. Castonel. The rector's emotion was less conspicuous, but his feeble form was bowed, his steps tottered, and his grey hair streamed in the wind. On the conclusion of the ceremony Mr. Castonel stepped into the mourning coach, solemnly to be conveyed home again at a mourning pace; but the rector passed aside and entered the parsonage. The sexton, a spare man in a brown wig, was shovelling in the earth upon the coffin, and shedding tears. He had carried Ellen many a time over the same spot when she was a little child.

CHAPTER V.

THE SIX GREY POWDERS.

A YOUNG and somewhat shy-looking man was making his way down the street of a country village. He appeared to be a stranger, and his clerical coat and white neckcloth betokened his calling. It would seem that he was in search of some house he could not readily find, for he peered curiously at several through his spectacles as he passed them. As he neared one, a handsome house with a green verandah, a cab, painted black, came dashing up, stopped, and there descended from it a gentleman and his servant in the deepest mourning. The stranger approached the master and courteously raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "can you obligingly point out to me the Rectory? I understood it to be somewhere here."

"At the end of the street, five minutes lower down. Opposite the church."

"*This* end of the street?" resumed the stranger, pointing to the way he had been journeying.

"I'll show you which it is with pleasure," cried a fine boy of fourteen, who appeared to be growing out of his jacket.

"What, is it you, Arthur?" said the owner of the cab. "Where did you spring from?"

The young gentleman had sprung from behind the cab, but he did not choose to say so. "I say, sir," he exclaimed,

passing the question, "you have not seen mamma anywhere, have you?"

"No."

"Oh, well, it's not my fault. She told me to meet her somewhere here as I came home from school, and she'd take me to have my hair cut. Old Brooks did not do it to please her last time, so she said she'd go and see it done. Now, sir," he added to the stranger, "I'll show you Mr. Leicester's."

They walked along together. "Do you know," said the boy, suddenly looking at his companion, "I can guess who you are? You are the new curate."

The stranger smiled. "How do you guess that?"

"Because your look like it. And we know Mr. Leicester had engaged one: the other did not suit. He is too ill now to do it all himself. Mamma says she is sure he won't live long. Do you know Mr. Castonel?"

"No. Who is Mr. Castonel?"

"Why, that was Mr. Castonel, and that was his cab. Did you see how black they were?"

"Yes. He appeared to be in deep mourning."

"It is for his wife. She was so pretty, and we all liked her so. She was Ellen Leicester, and Mr. Castonel ran away with her, and she died. That was last spring, and it's since then that Mr. Leicester has got so ill. His first wife died too."

"Who's first wife?" returned the stranger, scarcely making sense of the boy's tale.

"Mr. Castonel's."

"Are you speaking of the gentleman of whom I inquired my way? He looks young to have had two wives."

"He has, though. He is a doctor, and has all the practice. He keeps two assistants now. Do you know Mr. Tuck?"

"I do not know any one in Ebury."

"Oh, don't you? There's Mr. Leicester's," added the lad, pointing to a house, lower down, as they came to a turning in the street. "And now I have shown it you, I must go back, for if mamma comes and I don't meet her, she'll blow me up."

"Thank you for bringing me," said Mr. Hurst. "I hope we shall soon be better acquainted. Tell me your name."

"Arthur Chavasse. I am to be what you are. A parson."

"Indeed? I hope you will make a good one."

"I don't know. Last week when I sent the ball through the window and gave Lucy a black eye, papa and mamma were in a passion with me, and they said I had too much devil in me for a parson."

"I am sorry to hear that," was the grave answer.

"I have not got half the devil that some chaps have," continued Master Arthur. "I only leap hedges, and climb trees, and wade streams, and all that. I don't see what harm that can do a fellow, even if he is to be a parson."

"I fear it would seem to point that he might be more fitted for other callings in life."

"Then I just wish you'd tell them so at home. I don't want to be a parson, it's too tame a life for me. Good-bye, sir."

He flew away, a high-spirited, generous lad; and the curate—for such he was—looked after him. Then he turned in at the rectory gate.

He was shown into the room where the Reverend Christopher Leicester and his wife were sitting. Two sad, grey-haired people, the former very feeble, but not with age. Arthur Chavasse had given a pretty accurate account of matters. From the time that their only child had run away with Mr. Castonel, they had been breaking in health; but since her death, which had occurred six months subsequently, the rector may be said to have been a dying man.

There was certainly a fatality attending the wives of Mr. Castonel, and he appeared to mourn them with sincerity, especially the last. His attire was as black as mourning could be: he had put his cab into black, the crape on his hat extended from the brim to the crown, and he wore a mourning pin, and a mourning ring with Ellen's hair in it. He abstained from all gaiety, took a friendly cup of tea occasionally with Mr. and Mrs. Chavasse, and paid a formal visit to the Rector and Mrs. Leicester once a month.

The new curate, Mr. Hurst, was approved of by Ebury. He was possessed of an amazing stock of dry, book erudition, but was retiring and shy to a fault. He took up his abode at the parish beadle's, who let furnished lodgings, very comfortable and quiet. One day he received a visit from Mr. Chavasse, a bluff, hearty, good-tempered man, who was steward to the estate of the Earl of Eastbury, a neighbouring nobleman.

"I was talking to Mr. Leicester yesterday," began Mr. Chavasse, shaking hands, "and he told me he thought you were open to a reading engagement for an hour or so in the afternoons."

"Certainly," answered the curate, coughing in the nervous manner habitual to him when taken by surprise, "I should have no objection to employing my time in that way, when my duties for the day are over."

"That rascal of a boy of mine, Arthur—the lad has good abilities, I know, for in that respect he takes after his mother and Frances, yet there are nothing but complaints from school about his not getting on."

"Do you not fancy that his abilities may lie in a different direction—that he may be formed by nature for a more bustling life than a clerical one?" the curate ventured to suggest.

"Why, of course, if he has not got it in him, it would be

of no use to force him to be a parson; but there's such an opening. Lord Eastbury has promised me a living for him. Now it has struck me that if you would come, say at four o'clock, which is the hour he leaves school, and hammer something into him until half-past five, or six, we might see what stuff he is really made of. What do you say?"

"I could accept the engagement for every evening excepting Saturday," answered Mr. Hurst.

"All right," cried Mr. Chavasse. "One day lost out of the six won't matter. And now, sir, what shall you charge?"

The curate hesitated and blushed, and then named a very low sum.

"If it were not that I have so many children pulling at me, I should say it was too little by half," observed the straightforward Mr. Chavasse; "but I can't stand a high figure. My eldest son has turned out wild, and is a shocking expense to me. Shall we begin on Monday?"

"If you please. I shall be ready."

"And mind," he added, "that you always stop and take tea with us, when you have no better engagement. I shall tell Mrs. Chavasse to insist on that part of the bargain."

Thus it came to pass that the Reverend William Hurst became very intimate at the house of Mrs. Chavasse.

Autumn, winter, spring passed; and, with summer, things seemed to be brightening again. We speak of Mr. Castonel. He discarded his gloomy attire, his cab was repainted a claret colour, and he went again into general society. His practice flourished; if he had lost his own wives, he seemed lucky in saving those of other men. His assistants, like himself, had plenty to do. The gossips began to speculate whether he would marry again. "Surely not!" cried the timid

ones, shaking their heads with a shudder; "who would venture to have him?"

One hot afternoon Mr. Rice, one of the qualified assistant-surgeons of Mr. Castonel, was walking along a field path. The growing corn, rising on either side of him, was ripening, and the gay insects hummed pleasantly. He had just quitted a cottage, one of an humble row called Beech Cottages, close by. "Ah, how d'ye do?" cried he. "A lovely afternoon."

"Very." It was the curate who had met him. "Have you been far?"

"Only to Gaffer Shipley's. Mr. Castonel received some message this morning about the child: he did not choose to go himself, but sent me."

"Is it ill?" cried the curate, in tones of alarm. "It is not baptized. I never can get to see the mother about it."

"Ill? no. A trifle feverish. The poor do cram their children with such unwholesome food."

"I am on my way to Thomas Shipley's myself," observed Mr. Hurst. "Mr. Leicester asked me if I had seen him this week, so I thought I'd take a walk this way and call upon a few of them. Mr. Leicester seems to have a great regard for that old man."

"A decent man, I believe, he has been all his life," returned Mr. Rice. "And since his daughter forgot herself, people have wished to show him more respect than the rest."

"By the way," said the curate, "whose is the child?"

Mr. Rice laughed. "You had better ask that question of Mr. Castonel. *I* don't know."

They shook hands and parted; the surgeon proceeding to the residence of Mr. Castonel, where he busied himself for some little time, making up medicine. He had just concluded his task when Mr. Castonel entered.

"Well," said he, "what was the matter down at Shipley's?"

"Oh, nothing. Child somewhat feverish and stomach out of order. I have made up these powders for it. They will set it to rights."

"And that?" added Mr. Castonel, glancing from the powders to a bottle of mixture.

"For Mrs. Acre. I am off now to old Flockaway's."

As Mr. Rice quitted the laboratory, he met the tiger. "Some medicine to go out, John."

"Where to, sir?"

"Mr. Castonel will tell you. He is there."

John went into the laboratory. "Mr. Rice says there's some medicine to go out, sir."

Mr. Castonel did not reply immediately. He was writing something on a slip of paper.

"Go to the library," he said, handing it to John, "and inquire whether this book has arrived. If so, bring it."

"Can't I take the medicine at the same time, sir?"

"Do as you are bid, and nothing more," rejoined Mr. Castonel. "Bring me the book, if it is there, and then go with the medicine. You see where it is for; the mixture to Mrs. Acre's, the powders to Thomas Shipley's."

The tiger went off whistling, and his master remained in the laboratory. But when the boy returned, he was no longer there.

"Hannah!" sang out the lad.

"What do you want with Hannah?" demanded the housekeeper, putting her head outside the kitchen-door.

"Bid her tell master as the library says he never ordered the book at all, as they heered on; but if he wants it they can get it from London. Perhaps you'll condescend to tell him yourself, Madam Muff." He took up the medicine as he spoke, and went out again.

Meanwhile the Reverend William Hurst had left the cornfield, and proceeded to Gaffer Shipley's. The Gaffer—as he was styled in the village—lay in his bed in the back room. A fall from a ladder had laid him on it, and he would never rise again. Dame Vaughan was in the front room, sewing. She had been hired to attend the house during a recent illness of Mary Shipley's. "He is asleep, sir," she whispered, when she saw the curate about to enter: "he dropped off just now, and I think it will do him good."

Mr. Hurst nodded and drew away. He was bound to several cottages in the neighbourhood, so went to them first, and returned afterwards to Shipley's. The Gaffer was awake then.

"I'm ailing much, sir," he said. "Give my humble duty to Mr. Leicester, and thank him for asking. I'm as hot as I can be to-day. My skin feels burning."

"Did you tell this to Mr. Rice? He might have given you something."

"No, sir, I didn't. I had dropped off asleep when he was here, and Dame Vaughan never thought of it. I may be better to-morrow, and then I sha'n't want physic."

As the Gaffer spoke, Mr. Hurst saw the entrance of Mr. Castonel's tiger, the door being open between the two rooms. "Powders for somebody, Dame Vaughan," said he. "Who's ill?"

"This little one," replied Dame Vaughan, pointing to the infant on her lap.

"That young scaramouch! I thought, perhaps, the Gaffer might be a going to walk it."

"The Gaffer, poor man, ain't at all well," said Dame Vaughan.

"I say," resumed the lad, "where's Mary? What's she gone into hiding for? Nobody have set eyes on her this age. Give her my compliments, and——"

At this moment the boy caught sight of Mr. Hurst. It was quite enough. He touched his hat, backed out, and set off home.

When the curate passed through the front room to leave, he stopped and looked down at the baby. "It does not appear to be very ill, Mrs. Vaughan."

"No, sir, it's as live and peart as can be, this afternoon. I did not see much the matter with it this morning, for my own part, only Mary"—she hesitated—"Mary would send to tell Mr. Castonel."

"Where is Mary?"

"She's upstairs," whispered the woman. "She made off there, sir, when she saw you a coming. Poor thing, she don't like yet to face the gentlefolks."

As Dame Vaughan spoke, she was opening the packet left by the tiger. It contained six small neat white papers, which her curiosity led her to examine. They disclosed an insignificant portion of grey-coloured powder.

"I know what that is," she observed; "the very best physic you can give to a child. Will you please to read the direction for me, sir?"

"'One of these powders to be taken night and morning. Mary Shipley's infant.'"

"Ah, that's just what Mr. Rice said. Thank you, sir. Good day. I'll tell Mary what you say about bringing the baby to church."

It was then nearly four o'clock, and the curate, after calling in at home to wash his hands and brush his hair, made the best of his way to the house of Mr. Chavasse, scarcely knowing whether he was progressing thither on his head or his heels. That house contained all he could imagine of beauty, and goodness, and love. It was *his* world. Had he not been a clergyman, he might have said his paradise.

Arthur was already in the study. And when the lessons were over, the curate entered the drawing-room, he and his fluttering heart. There she was, with her graceful form, her fine features, and her dark, brilliant eye. For him there was but one lovely face on earth, and it was that of Frances Chavasse.

To him she was a perfect contrast. Open in manner, ready and pleasant in speech, the Reverend William Hurst, when he first knew her, could only gaze at her through his spectacles with amazed admiration. She detected his homage; she soon detected his love; and, true to her vain nature, she gave it encouragement. Vanity was Frances Chavasse's ruling passion. She was this evening attired in a pink muslin dress, very pretty and showy, and when Mr. Hurst entered she was standing before the glass, putting some fresh-gathered roses into her dark hair. That poor beating heart of his leaped into his mouth at the sight.

"See what I am doing?" she said, perceiving his approach in the glass. "For fun."

He took the hand she carelessly extended behind, took it, and clasped it, and retained it: for it had come, now, that he no longer strove so arduously to conceal his love.

"Are they not pretty roses, Mr. Hurst? I plucked them off that tree by the lower garden. You know it. Here's just one left. I will give it to you."

"And I," he whispered, taking it from her hand, "*will* keep it for ever."

"Oh," cried Frances, laughing, "what a collection you must have, if you have kept all I have given you! You might set up a museum of dried flowers."

Arthur ran in, and looked at the table with a blank face. "Why is tea not ready? It has struck six."

"Mamma has gone out: we shall not have tea till she

comes home," answered Frances. "Papa has not come in either."

"Then I can't wait," cried Arthur, ruefully. "I sha'n't wait."

"I would faint if I were you," retorted Frances. "I know you must be famished: though you did take enough dinner for six, at one o'clock."

"I want to be off to cricket," returned the lad. "I shall get my tea in the kitchen. What have you been sticking those things in your head for?"

"For you to admire."

"Ah! I expect it is for somebody else to admire. Take care, sir," added the boy, significantly; "she will flirt your heart out, and then turn round and say she didn't mean it."

A glimpse of angry passion flashed into the face of Frances. But Arthur escaped from the room.

"Don't mind him," whispered the curate. "All boys are the same."

"All are not the same," said Frances, crossly. "Were you the same when you were young?"

"I never had a sister," sighed the curate. He drew her hand within his arm, and they rambled into the garden. He had long been screwing up his courage to speak more seriously to her, and he thought he would do it now.

"I hope I shall not always remain a curate," he began, by way of introduction.

"I hope not," assented Frances.

"If I were to"—here he was stopped by his nervous cough—"to go into housekeeping, how much do you think it would take?"

"Housekeeping? I suppose you mean, set up a house and keep servants?"

"Yes," coughed the curate. "Were I lucky enough to

obtain a preferment of two hundred a year, would it do?"

"You would have hard work to spend it all, *you yourself*. Look at that lime tree: pretty, is it not?"

"Not by myself," returned the curate, a rosy hue on his thin cheek. "If I had——one to share it with me?"

"That's another thing," said Frances, with a laugh. "She might be fond of dress and nonsense, as I am, and then she would spend you out of house and home."

"Oh, Frances!" he murmured, his nervous tone giving place to an impassioned one, as he clasped her hands in his, and turned his spectacles lovingly upon her face, "I know I ought not yet to speak of it; but give me a hope—that, should the time come when I am justified in asking for you, I shall not ask in vain."

Frances drew her hands away, and speeded towards the house. "It will be soon enough to talk of that when the time does come," was her light answer. To the simple mind of Mr. Hurst it conveyed all he wished for.

Mrs. Chavasse came in. And scarcely had they sat down to tea, when one of the servants appeared and said that a boy wanted Mr. Hurst.

"Don't disturb yourself!" cried Mr. Chavasse, as the curate was rising. "Let Nancy ask what he wants."

"It is Ned Long, the mason's boy from Beech Cottages," said the servant.

"What can he want?" wondered the curate. "I gave them relief to-day."

"Send him round to the window, Nancy," said Mr. Chavasse.

A young ragamuffin, in a very dilapidated state of clothes, was soon discerned approaching the large window, which was open to the ground. He took off an old blue cap, and displayed a shock head of light hair.

"What is it, Ned?" cried the curate.

"Please, sir," answered the lad, lifting his sunburnt, freckled countenance, "I have been to Mr. Leicester's, and he telled me to come and ask whether Mr. Hurst was here."

"Well, you see I am," replied Mr. Hurst, with a half-smile.

"He said, please, as I was to tell you what I had telled him, and would you go on quick, and he'd get a fly and come after, but he was too bad to walk."

"Go where?" cried the curate. "To Mr. Leicester's?"

"No, sir, to Gaffer Shipley's. He's took awful."

"How? Is he worse?"

"He's a dying, sir; Dame Vaughan said I was to say so. He can't hold hisself still on his bed for screeching. And the babby's a dying and a screeching; it's on Dame Vaughan's lap, it is, and she says they won't be alive many minutes, and it's the physic as she give 'em."

They had risen, all of them, and gathered round the window, looking at the boy. Mrs. Chavasse spoke, in her sharp, hasty way.

"What is it you are saying, Ned Long? Tell your tale properly. Who is it that is dying down at Shipley's?"

"The Gaffer, ma'am, and the babby."

"Both?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I never heard of such a thing. You must have brought your tale wrong, boy."

"Dame Vaughan says as it's the physic."

"What physic?"

"I doesn't know."

"I never saw such a stupid boy! who is to make out what he means!" irritably repeated Mrs. Chavasse, her curiosity forcibly excited. "Mr. Hurst—— Why, where's Mr. Hurst? He has never gone without taking his tea!"

He had, and was striding over the ground towards Thomas Shipley's cottage. A strange scene presented itself there. The baby was lying dead, and the old man on his bed seemed in danger of dissolution. "What is the cause of this?" questioned the curate.

"I don't know what's the cause," sobbed Dame Vaughan. "I hope no blame won't be laid to me."

It appeared that the Gaffer had had his tea at four o'clock, and seemed refreshed and better after it. At six, when Dame Vaughan undressed the infant, she remarked that it appeared so well as scarcely to need the powder.

"Suppose we give father one of the powders?" suggested Mary, a modest-looking, gentle girl, who, until recent events, had been in high favour in the village. "If they are fever powders, it might do him good; and it couldn't do him harm, any way."

"Ay, sure; it's a good thought," assented Dame Vaughan. "We'll give him one to-night and another in the morning. This child won't want 'em all."

So they mixed up two powders, giving old Shipley his, first, lest he should fall asleep; and the other to the child. Soon after the latter had swallowed it, it began to scream, and writhe, and toss convulsively. Its legs were drawn up, and then stretched out stiff, whilst its face, to use Dame Vaughan's words, was not then the face of a baby. The neighbours came flocking in, and, suddenly, sounds were heard from Gaffer Shipley's bed: he was screaming and writhing like the child. Widow Thorpe's boy was despatched for Mr. Castonel, and another as we have seen, to Mr. Leicester's.

The boy, Thorpe, was flying along, proud to be of service and full of excitement when, by a piece of good fortune, which Dame Vaughan declared she should ever be thankful for, he espied Mr. Castonel. "He was a standing outside

the lodge, where the strange lady lives," said the boy, afterwards, "and, if he had been a waiting for me, he couldn't have been a standing out better." The boy made up to him, panting. "Please, sir, will you run down to Gaffer Shipley's?"

"What for?" asked Mr. Castonel.

"They are both howling horrid, sir. Dame Vaughan says it must have been the powders as they took."

"Both who?" quickly demanded Mr. Castonel

"Mary Shipley's little 'un and the Gaffer, sir They give 'em a powder apiece, and mother says——"

"What the——!" burst forth Mr. Castonel, glaring on the boy. "Who gave one to old Shipley?"

Master Thorpe shrank aside. He did not, just then, like the face of Mr. Castonel. "Here," added the surgeon, writing a line on the leaf of his pocket-book, and tearing it out, "take that to my house. Mr. Rice will give you something to bring down. Run all the way."

The boy ran one way, Mr. Castonel ran the other. He flew over the ground at his utmost speed, and was soon at the cottage. The baby was dead: Mary was stretched over it, sobbing and crying, and the gossips were crying over *her*.

"Now, the first thing, a clearance," exclaimed the surgeon, "and then I may come to the bottom of this. Leave the cottage, every one of you."

He held the door open and the women filed out. Then he turned to Dame Vaughan. "Have you any warm water?"

"Not a drop, sir," she sobbed, "and the fire's out. It was the powders, and it couldn't have been nothing else. Mr. Rice must have sent poison in mistake for wholesome physic."

"I should think not," remarked Mr. Castonel. "Let me see those that are left. Mary," he irritably added, "don't

sob and moan in that way; that will do no good. One, two, three, four. Are these all?"

"All, sir," replied Dame Vaughan. "Six come, and them's the four what's left."

Mr. Castonel carried them in his hand through the room where Thomas Shipley was lying, and went out to the back door, which he closed after him, and examined them, alone, in the yard. Possibly for greater light.

"There's nothing wrong with these powders," he said, when he returned. "However, Dame Vaughan, you had best take charge of them, in case they should be asked for."

"I'll lock 'em up in Mary's drawer," she sobbed. "I know it was the powders, and I'll stick to it till I drops."

"Do so at once. Here, take them. And then go amongst the neighbours and see if you can borrow some warm water. If we can get a quart of it down the Gaffer's throat, till what I have sent for comes, so much the better. Halloa! where are you off to?"

"I thought you told me to fetch some warm water," answered Dame Vaughan, arresting her footsteps.

"But I did not tell you to leave the key in the drawer. The powders are perfectly harmless, but it may be as well, in justice to Mr. Rice, to let other people think so."

Mr. Rice and young Thorpe came together, full pelt, and it was soon after their entrance that Mr. Hurst appeared. When the Gaffer had been attended to, Dame Vaughan returned to the powders.

"The powders were all right," said Mr. Rice. "I'll stake my life upon it. Where are they? They were only hydrargyrus cum creta," he added to Mr. Castonel.

"I know they were. I have examined them."

Dame Vaughan unlocked the drawer, and put the powders on the table before Mr. Rice. He opened all four of the papers. The curate, Mr. Castonel, and Dame Vaughan

stood and watched him. "These are the powders I sent," he observed. "They are quite right. They are only the common grey-powder, Dame Vaughan."

Dame Vaughan still looked unconvinced.

"Let her take charge of them," said Mr. Castonel. "It may be more satisfactory."

"Is it possible," interposed the curate, "that the powders can in any way have been changed?—wrong ones administered?"

Mr. Castonel turned his eye upon him, an eye that looked as if it would have liked to strike him dead as a child. "No, sir," he coldly said, "I should think it is not possible. Did you wish to cast a suspicion on Mrs. Vaughan?"

"Nay," cried the curate, "certainly not. I would not cast a suspicion upon any one. It was but an idea that occurred to me, and I spoke it out."

Gaffer Shipley recovered, the baby was buried, and the affair remained a mystery. A mystery that has never been positively solved. Other medical men, upon being pressed into the inquiry, pronounced the powders to be an innocent and proper medicine, frequently given to children.

That same night, at an early starlight hour, Frances Chavasse was lingering still in their garden. She looked frequently towards a side-gate, by which visitors who were familiar with the house sometimes entered. It seemed that she was restless; anxious; impatient. Whoever she was expecting, kept her waiting long. Was it Mr. Hurst?

It was not Mr. Hurst who entered; it was Mr. Castonel. What! were *they* lovers? Surely yes; for he strained her to his heart, and held her to him, and covered her face with his impassioned kisses; as he had, in other days, ay, even in that same garden, strained to him Caroline Hall and Ellen Leicester. Was his love for her genuine? Had it been so for his former wives? No matter! theirs had been for

him: and neither had loved him more fervently than did Frances Chavasse. Verily Mr. Castonel must have possessed powers of fascination unknown to other men! Frances had played herself off upon the unhappy curate, partly to gratify her vanity, partly as a blind, for she and Mr. Castonel had long had an understanding in secret.

"The Reverend William Hurst has been explicit to-night," whispered Frances in mocking tones.

"The fool!" interrupted Mr. Castonel; and the glare of his eye was such as it had been twice before, that evening. Frances did not see it; she was leaning on his breast.

"He asked me how much it would take to keep two," she went on, laughing. "And would I have him if he were given a rich living of two hundred a year. Gervase, I think, I do think, he will nearly die when—when—he knows."

"I hope he will," fiercely uttered Mr. Castonel. "Frances, the time is drawing near that I shall speak to your father."

"Yet a little longer," she sighed. "He happened to say, only last night, that it seemed but yesterday since Ellen died. Mamma must break it to him, whenever it is spoken of. She can turn him round her little finger."

CHAPTER VI.

A VAIN REMONSTRANCE.

One Saturday afternoon, in September, the Reverend Christopher Leicester sent for his curate. It was to inform him that he found himself unable to preach on the morrow, as had been his intention.

"Are you worse?" inquired Mr. Hurst.

"A little thing upsets me now, and I have heard some news to-day, which, whether true or not, will take me days to get over, for it has brought back to me too forcibly one who is gone. Who is that?" quickly added the rector, as a shout was heard outside the window.

"It is only Arthur Chavasse. I met him at the gate, and he ran in with me."

"Let him come in, let him come in," cried Mr. Leicester, eagerly. "He can tell me if it be true."

Mr. Hurst called to him.

"How are you, sir?" said Arthur, holding out his hand. "And how is Mrs. Leicester?"

The rector shook his head. "As well, my boy, as we can expect to be on this side the grave. Arthur, when you shall be as I am, health and strength gone, there is only one thing that will give you comfort."

"And what's that, sir?" asked Arthur, fearlessly.

"The remembrance of a well-spent life; a conscience

that says you have done good in it, not evil. Good to your fellow-creatures, for Christ's sake, Who did so much good for you."

"But are we to have no play?" inquired Arthur, whose ideas of "doing good," like those of too many others, savoured only of gloom.

"Ah, play; play, my boy, while you may; youth is the season for it. But, in the midst of it, love your fellow-creatures: be ever ready to do them a kindness: should any fancied injury rise up in your heart whispering you to return evil for evil, oh! yield not to the impulse. You will be thankful for it when your days are numbered."

"Yes, sir. There's a boy outside has gone off with my cricket-bat. It's Tom Chewton. I was going after him to give him a drubbing. Perhaps I had better make him hand over the bat, and leave the drubbing out?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Leicester, whilst the curate turned away his head to hide a smile. "Arthur, I have heard to-day that you are going to lose your sister Frances."

"To lose her!" echoed the boy. "Oh yes, I know what you mean. And I am sure it's true, although Mrs. Frances is so sly over it, else why should she be having such heaps of new clothes? I said to her the other day, 'I reckon I shall get some rides inside the cab now, instead of behind it,' and she turned scarlet and threw a cushion at me."

"It is really so, then! that she marries Mr. Castonel!"

"He has been making love to her this past year, only they did it on the sly," continued Arthur. "*I* saw. She's always interfering with us boys: we shall have twice the fun when she's gone. Where's Mr. Hurst?"

"Take this, Arthur," cried the rector, handing him a fine pear which was on the table. "Good-bye, my lad."

"Thank you, sir. Good-bye. I'll leave out Tom Chewton's drubbing."

Arthur ran out. Mr. Hurst stood at the end of the path, against the iron railings. "Isn't this a stunning pear? I—— Why, what's the matter, sir?"

"A spasm," gasped the curate. "Run off to your playfellows, Arthur."

"Will you eat this pear, sir?" said the boy, gazing with concern at his white face. "It may do you good. I have only taken one bite out of it."

"No, no my lad. Eat it yourself, and run away."

Arthur did as he was bid, and the miserable clergyman, feeling himself what he was, a dupe, dragged his footsteps towards his home. The sun shone brilliantly, but the heart's sunshine had gone out from him for ever.

The news took Ebury by surprise. What! marry Frances Chavasse, the early friend of his two first wives! Some of them remembered the nonsensical declaration attributed to Mr. Castonel when he first came to Ebury—that only one of the three young ladies was to his taste, but he would marry them all. The "one" being generally supposed to indicate Ellen Leicester.

The preparations, commenced for the marriage, were on an extensive scale. The tiger flew one day into the kitchen at his master's with the news that there was a new chariot in the course of construction, and that he was no longer to be a despised tiger in buttons, but a footman in a splendid livery.

"A pretty footman you will make!" was the slighting response of the housekeeper, whilst Hannah suspended her ironing in admiration.

"And the new coachman's to be under me," he continued, dancing round in a circle three feet wide. "Of course I shall have the upper hand of *him*. So don't you go for to disparage me before him, Madam Muff, if you please."

"Did master say he was to be under you?" inquired Hannah.

"It's to be such a gorgeous livery," the tiger went on, avoiding the question, "lavender and gold, or pink and amber, one o' them two, with spangled vests to match. And there's going to be a new lady's maid, Mrs. Muff, over you."

"John!" uttered the housekeeper, in a tone of warning.

"She's hired o' purpose," persisted the tiger, dodging out of Mrs. Muff's way, and improving upon his invention. "And the house is to be gutted of this precious shabby old furniture, and bran-new put in, from cellar to garret. The beds is to be of silk, and the tables of ivory, and the walls is to be gilded, and one o' the rooms is to have a glass floor, that Miss Chavasse may see her feet in it. I know what—if master is determined to have her, he's paying for her."

He dodged away, for Mrs. Muff's countenance was growing ominous But, setting aside a few inaccuracies, inventions, and embellishments of his own, the tiger's information was on the whole correct; and Mrs. Chavasse and her daughter were lifted out of their ordinary realm into one that savoured not of sober reality. They revelled in fine clothes making for Frances, in the luxurious establishment preparing to receive her, in the wondering admiration of Ebury; and they revelled in the triumph over Mrs. Leicester. If her daughter had once been preferred to Frances, their turn had come now; there had been no costly furniture, or painted carriages, or superfluity of servants prepared for Ellen.

These preparations, in all their magnitude, burst without warning upon the astonished senses of Mr. Chavasse. He turned all over in a cold perspiration, and went storming into the presence of his wife and daughter. Mrs. Chavasse always, as she expressed it, "managed" her husband,

consequently she had taken her own time for telling him; but it happened that he heard the news from another quarter. We allude more particularly now to the pomp and show contemplated for the wedding-day: it was that raised the ire of Mr. Chavasse.

"What a couple of born idiots you must be! I have been told Frances is going to have four bridesmaids."

"Well?"

"And a heap of noise and parade: horses and carriages, and servants and favours——"

"Now don't put yourself out," equably interposed Mrs. Chavasse.

"And not satisfied with all that, you are going to have flowers strewed up the churchyard path for her to walk upon!" And his voice almost rose to a shout. "Hadn't you better have a carpet laid down through the street?"

"I did think of that," was Mrs. Chavasse's cool reply.

"Goodness be gracious to me! The place will think I have turned fool, to suffer it."

"Let them," said Mrs. Chavasse. "Her wedding does not come every day."

"I had a misgiving that something was going on, I declare I had, when you badgered me into asking Lord Eastbury to give her away," continued Mr. Chavasse, rubbing his heated face. "I wish I hadn't. What a fool *he*'ll think me! A land-steward's daughter marrying a country surgeon, and coming out in this style! It's disgusting."

"My dear, you'll make yourself ill. Speak lower. Frances, this is the wrong pattern."

"And that's not the worst of it. Mrs. Chavasse, listen, for I will be heard: It is perfectly barbarous to enact all this in the eyes of the Rector and Mrs. Leicester. I shall never be able to look them in the face again."

"You'll get over that."

"Any one but you would have a woman's feelings on the matter. I tell you it is nothing less than a direct insult to them—a wicked triumph over their dead child. You ought to shrink from it, Frances, if your mother does not."

But poor Mr. Chavasse could gain no satisfaction from either, though he nearly talked himself into a fever. Mrs. Chavasse always had been mistress, and always would be. Everybody, save Mrs. Chavasse herself, thought and *knew* that what she was doing was ridiculous and absurd. Even Mr. Castonel dreaded the display. But nothing stopped Mrs. Chavasse, and the wedding-day rose in triumph. It was a sunny day in December, less cold than is usual: but Ebury was in too much excitement to think of cold. Never had such a wedding been seen there. You might have walked on the people's heads all round the church, and inside the church you could not have walked at all. When the crowd saw the flowers on the narrow path between the graves—lovely flowers from the gardens of Eastbury—they asked each other what could possess Mrs. Chavasse.

The bridal procession started. The quiet carriage of the dean of a neighbouring cathedral city led the way. He was an easy, good-natured dean, loving good cheer, even when it came in the shape of a wedding-breakfast, and Mrs. Chavasse had manœuvred to get him to officiate, "to meet the Earl of Eastbury," so his carriage headed the van. But, ah, reader! whose equipage is this which follows? It is new and handsome, the harness of its fine horses glitters with ornaments, the purple-and-drab liveries of its servants look wonderful in the sun. Mr. Castonel's arms are on its panels, and Mr. Castonel himself, impervious as ever to the general eye, sits within it. Behind—can it be?—yes, it is our old friend the tiger, a really good-looking

youth in his new appurtenances; his dignity, however, is somewhat marred by the familiar nods and winks he bestows upon his friends in the crowd. Now comes the fashionable carriage of the Earl of Eastbury, with its showy emblazonments and its prancing steeds. The bride sits in it, with her vanity, and her beauty, and her rich attire; Lord Eastbury (as good-natured a man as the dean) is opposite to her, lounging carelessly; Mrs. Chavasse, puffed up with pride, looks out on all sides, demanding the admiration of the spectators; and Mr. Chavasse sits with a red face, and does not dare to look at all, for he is thoroughly ashamed of the whole affair, and of the string of carriages yet to come.

The intention of Mr. and Mrs. Leicester to leave home for the day had been frustrated, for the rector had slipped down some stairs the previous night and injured his ankle. They sat at home in all their misery, listening to the gay show outside, and to the wedding-bells. The remembrance of their lost child was wringing their hearts: her loving childhood, her endearing manners, her extreme beauty, *her disobedience*, and her melancholy death. Verily this pomp and pageantry was to them an insult, as Mr. Chavasse had said; an inexcusable and bitter mockery. It was Ellen's husband that was being made happy with another, it was Ellen's early friend who was now to usurp her place. Oh, Mrs. Chavasse! did it never once occur to you that day, to read a lesson from the past? You sat by your child's side, swelling with folly and exultation, but did no warning, no shadow fall upon you? Already had Mr. Castonel wedded two flowers as fair as she, and where were they? No, no; the imagination of Mrs. Chavasse, at its widest range, never extended to so dreadful a fate as that for Frances.

"What with weddings and buryings, he has played a

tolerable part at this church," observed one of the mob, gazing after Mr. Castonel.

Yes, he had: but he made the marriage responses as clearly and firmly as though he had never made them to others, then lying within a few yards of him. He knelt there, and vowed to love and cherish her, and when the links were irrevocably fastened he led her out through the admiring crowd, over the crushed flowers, to the new carriage. John, not a whit less vain, just then, than his new mistress, held the door open, and Frances entered it. She could not have told whether her pride was greater at taking her seat, for the first time, in a chariot of her own, or during the few minutes that she had occupied the coroneted carriage of Lord Eastbury.

More pomp, more display, more vanity at the breakfast, where Frances sat on Lord Eastbury's right hand, and Mrs. Chavasse on that of the dean, and then the new carriage drew up again, with four horses and two postboys, and Hannah, instead of John, seated behind it. A little delay, to the intense gratification of the assembled mob, and Mr. and Mrs. Castonel came out and entered it, to be conveyed on the first stage of their honeymoon. A singular circumstance occurred as they were whirled along. Leaning over a roadside gate, and looking openly at the chariot, watching for it, with a scornful triumph on her handsome face, stood the strange lady who inhabited the lodge. She waved her hand at Mr. Castonel, and the latter, with a sudden rush of red to his impassive countenance, leaned back in his carriage. Frances did not speak: she saw it: but the time had scarcely come for her to inquire particulars about his mysterious relation. Ere Mr. Castonel had well recovered his equanimity, they flew past another gate, and there, peeping only, and concealing herself as much as possible, rose the pale, sad face of Mary

Shipley. Mr. Castonel drew back again. Frances spoke now.

"Gervase! Mary Shipley was hiding behind that gate; peeping at us. How strange! Did you see her?"

"My dearest, no. I see but you. You are mine now, Frances, for ever."

CHAPTER VII.

A WEDDING-PEAL.

A GENIAL Christmas-eve, bright and frosty, and merrily blazed the fire in a comfortable kitchen of one of the best houses in a country village. It was the residence of the surgeon, and he was out on his wedding-tour, having just espoused his third wife.

They were expected home that night, and preparations for the following day's feast were being actively presided over by the housekeeper, Mrs. Muff, a staid, respectable personage, much above the grade of a common servant. She was very busy, standing at the table, when the surgeon's tiger (we must still call him so, though he had recently assumed the garb of a footman) came into the kitchen, drew a chair right in front of the great fire, and sat down, as though he meant to roast himself.

"John," said Mrs. Muff, "I'll trouble you to move from there."

John sat on, without stirring.

"Do you hear?" repeated the housekeeper. "I want to come to the fire every minute, and how can I do so with you planted there?"

"What a shame it is!" grumbled John, drawing himself and his chair away, for he was completely under the dominion of Mrs. Muff. "Whoever heerd of cooking a dinner the night afore you want to eat it?—except the pudding."

"'I must put things forward, and do what can be done: there will be too much left for to-morrow, even then, with all the Chavasses dining here. For I don't stop away from service on Christmas-day for any one. I never did yet, and I'm not going to begin now."

The tiger screwed up his mouth, as if giving vent to a long whistle: taking care that no sound of it reached the ears of Mrs. Muff.

"You can take the holly and dress the rooms. Saving enough, mind, for the kitchen. And then, John, you can lay the cloth in the dining-room, and carry in the tea-things."

"There's lots of time for that," returned John.

"It has struck eight, and Mr. Castonel's letter said nine. Do as I bid you."

She was interrupted by the sound of young voices, rising in song, outside.

"There's another set!" cried John, indignantly. "That makes the third lot we have had here to-night."

"When they have finished, you may look out and bring me word how many there are," said Mrs. Muff.

John left the kitchen, his arms full of holly and evergreen. Presently he came back.

"There's no less than five of them little devils."

Mrs. Muff, with a stern reprimand, dived into her pockets, and brought forth five halfpence. "Give them one apiece, John."

"If it was me, now, as was missis, instead of you, I should favour 'em with a bucket of water from a upstairs window," was John's response, as he ungraciously took the halfpence. "They'll only go and send others. Suppose master and missis and the new carriage should just drive up, and find them rascallions a squeaking round the door!"

"Christmas would not be Christmas without its carols," returned Mrs. Muff. "I remember, the first winter you

were down here, you came on the same errand to old Mr. Winnington's, and got a mince-pie and a penny out of me."

"Ah," replied John, "but I was a young donkey then."

It was past ten when the carriage rolled up to the door. John flew to open it, and Mrs. Muff, in her black silk gown and white apron, stood in the hall, drawing on her leather mittens. Frances, Mrs. Castonel, happy and blooming, sprang from the carriage and entered her new home. Mrs. Muff led the way to the dining-room. It looked bright and cheering, with its large fire, its blazing lamps, and well-spread table, half supper, half tea. "I will go upstairs first," said the young bride, "and take these wraps off."

Mr. Castonel came in, a slight man of middle height, scarcely yet five-and-thirty, and the tiger followed him. "Well, John," said he, "how has Mr. Rice got on with the patients?"

"Pretty well, sir. None of 'em be dead, and some be well. But they have been a grumbling."

"Grumbling! What about?"

"They say if a doctor gets married, he has no right to go away like other folks, and that this is the third time you have served 'em so. It was gouty old Flockaway said the most. He have had another attack; and he was so cranky Mr. Rice wouldn't go anigh him, and he can't abear Mr. Tuck."

The surgeon laughed. "What's coming in for tea, John?"

"Some muffins, sir. And Mrs. Muff says she knows as that will be one of the best tongues you have cut into."

"Bring tea in at once. It is late."

As the tiger withdrew, Mrs. Castonel entered. Her husband's arms were open to receive her. "Oh, Gervase," she exclaimed, "how kind of you to have everything in such beautiful order for me!"

"Welcome, a thousand times welcome to your home, my love!" he whispered. "May it ever appear to you as bright as it does now!"

Loving words; loving manner! But, alas! they had been proffered before, with the same apparently earnest sincerity: once to Caroline Hall, and again to sweet Ellen Leicester.

"If you don't send in them muffins, ma'am, without further delay, master says he'll know the reason why," was the tiger's salutation to Mrs. Muff.

She was buttering them, and listening to Hannah's account of the journey, for she had attended Mrs. Castonel. She turned to give him the plate; but stopped and started, for the church bells had rung out a joyous peal.

"It cannot be midnight!" she exclaimed.

"Midnight!" sarcastically echoed the tiger. "It wants a good hour and a half o' that. There's the clock afore you."

"Then what possesses the bells?"

"Well, you be rightly named," returned the tiger, "for you *be* a muff, a out-and-outer. Them bells is for master and missis; not for Christmas, I know. The ringers is sitting up, and heerd the carriage rattle up the street. Hark, how they are clapping the steam on! They'll think to get a double Christmas-box from master."

Just before Mr. Castonel went to his room that night the bells again struck out. They were ringing-in Christmas. He stood and listened to them, a peculiar expression in his unfathomable eyes, his passionless face, whose emotions were so completely under control. Was he speculating upon what the next year should bring forth ere those Christmas bells should again sound? The next year! The clock struck out: he counted its strokes: Twelve! Then he took his candle and went upstairs. And the bells began again.

"A merry Christmas to you, Frances," he said, as he entered the chamber; "a merry Christmas, and many of them."

"Thank you," she laughed. "I think it must be a good omen to receive these wishes the moment it comes in."

Whilst she was speaking, a loud summons was heard at the house-door. It was a messenger for Mr. Castonel, from one of his best patients. He hurried out, and Mrs. Castonel composed herself to sleep.

A singular dream visited Mrs. Castonel. She thought she was sporting in her girlhood's days, in her father's large old garden, with her companions, Caroline Hall and Ellen Leicester. How gay they were, how *happy:* for the sense of present happiness was greater than ever Frances had experienced in reality; ay, although she had married where she passionately loved. They were dressed as if for a rejoicing, all in white, but the materials of her own attire appeared to be of surpassing richness. A table, laid out for feasting, was lighted by a lamp; but a lamp that gave a most brilliant and unearthly light, overpowering the glare of day. The table and lamp in her own dining-room that night had probably given the colouring to this part of her dream. The garden was not exactly like her father's, either; in form alone it bore a resemblance to it; it was more what Frances had sometimes imagined of Eden: flowers, birds, light, and the sensation of joyous gladness, all were too beautiful for earth. The banquet appeared to be waiting for them, whilst they waited the presence of another. He came; it was Gervase Castonel. He advanced with a smile for all, and beckoned them to take their places at table. A fierce jealousy arose in Frances's heart: what business had he to smile upon the others? But, imperceptibly, the others were gone, without Frances having noticed the manner of their departure. The old happiness

came back again; the ecstatic sense of bliss in the present; and she put her arm within his, to walk round that lovely garden. Then she remembered her companions, and asked Mr. Castonel where they had gone to. He said he would show her; and, approaching a door in the hedge, pushed it open. Frances looked out, and the fearful contrast to the lovely spot she had quitted, struck the most terrifying agony to her breast; for, beyond, all was utter darkness. She shrank back with a shudder, but Mr. Castonel with a fiendish laugh pushed her through, and a voice called out, "To your doom! to your doom!" If *his* voice, it was much altered. Frances awoke with the horror, but the most heavenly music was sounding in her ears; so heavenly, that it chased away her terror, and she thought herself again in that happy garden.

She half opened her eyes; she was but half awake, and still were heard the strains of that sweet music. Had she gone to sleep, and awakened in heaven? for surely such music was never heard on earth. The thought occurred to her in her half-conscious state. The music died away in the air, and Frances sat up in bed, and rubbed her eyes, and wondered; and just then Mr. Castonel returned. "What is it?" she cried, bewildered; "what is it?"

"The Waits," replied Mr. Castonel. "What did you think it was, Frances?"

"Only the Waits!" And then, with a rushing fear, came back the dreadful part of her ominous dream; and she broke into sobs and strove to tell it him.

But these night-terrors pass away with the light of day, sometimes pass and leave no sign, even in remembrance.

The heads and eyes of Ebury were turned towards a gay and handsome chariot that went careering down the street, attended by its coachman and footman. A lady and

gentleman were in it, she in brilliant attire: Mr. and Mrs. Castonel were returning their wedding visits. It stopped at the gate of the rectory.

"Don't stay long, Frances," he whispered to her.. "I always feel frozen into stone when I am in the presence of those two old people."

Mrs. Castonel smiled, and sailed into the rectory drawing-room in all her finery; but she really did, for a moment, forget her triumph, when she saw the saddened look of poor Mrs. Leicester, and the mourning robes still worn for Ellen. Mrs. Leicester had not paid, as it was called, the wedding visit; she had felt unequal to it; her card and an apology of illness had been her substitutes. Frances sat five minutes, and from thence the carriage was ordered to her old home. It encountered Mr. Hurst: he took off his hat, and the red colour flushed his cheek. Frances alone returned his bow.

Mrs. Chavasse was in no pleasant temper. She was grumbling at her husband, because he had kept dinner waiting. He was standing before the fire in his velveteen coat and leather gaiters, warming his frostbitten hands.

"I can't help it," said he. "If I were to neglect Lord Eastbury's business he would soon get another steward, and where would you all be then? You have been making calls, I suppose, Frances?"

"Only at the rectory, papa."

Mr. Chavasse turned sharply round from the fire, and faced his daughter.

"The rectory! In that trim!"

Frances felt annoyed. "What trim? What do you mean, papa?"

"*I* should have gone in a quiet way, to call there," returned Mr. Chavasse. "Gone on foot, and left some of those gewgaws and bracelets at home. You might have

stepped in and taken a quiet cup of tea with them: anything of that sort."

"In the name of wonder, what for?" sharply spoke up Mrs. Chavasse. "Frances has gone just as I should have gone."

Mr. Chavasse did not continue the subject. "Will you stay and take some dinner, Frances?"

"And find it half cold," interposed Mrs. Chavasse.

"I would not stay for the world, papa. I have other calls to make and Emily Lomax is coming to dine with me afterwards, that we may lay down the plans for my ball. It will be such a beautiful ball, papa: the best ever given in Ebury."

"Mind you have plenty of wax-lights, Frances," advised her mother.

"Oh, I shall have everything; lights, and hot-house plants, and champagne in abundance. Gervase let's me have it all my own way."

"Do not begin that too soon," said Mr. Chavasse, nodding at his son-in-law.

"Where's the use of contradiction?" laughed the surgeon, as they rose to leave:

"For when a woman will, she will, you may depend on't,
And when she won't, she won't; and there's an end on't."

Frances Castonel was just then the envy of Ebury, at least of all who considered ease and gaiety the only happiness of life. Parties at home, parties abroad; dress, jewels, equipage, show; not a care clouded her countenance, not a doubt of the future fell on her mind; and the shadows of those who were gone haunted her not.

One wet day, at an early hour, when she was not likely to meet other visitors, Mrs. Leicester called. She had thought by delay to gain composure; but it failed her; and, after greeting Frances, she hid her face in her hands and burst into bitter tears.

"You must forgive me, Frances," she sobbed. "The last time I entered this house it was for the purpose of seeing my child in her coffin."

Frances felt dreadfully uncomfortable, wondering what she could say, and wishing the visit were over. As ill-luck would have it, she had been hunting in a lumber closet that morning, and had come upon a painting and two drawings, done by the late Mrs. Castonel. One of them bore her name in the corner, "Ellen Castonel." Frances had carried them down in her hand and put them on the table, wishing now, she had put them in the fire instead.

"These are poor Ellen's," exclaimed Mrs. Leicester, as her eye fell on them. "She did them just before her death. I have wondered what became of them, but did not like to ask. Would you mind giving me one, Frances? This with her name on it: it is her own writing."

"All—take them all, dear Mrs. Leicester."

"I would thankfully do so, but perhaps Mr. Castonel values them."

"Indeed, no," answered Frances, with inexcusable want of consideration; "you may be sure he has never looked at them since they were done. I rummaged them out of an old lumber closet this morning."

Mrs. Leicester took the drawings in silence, and then took the hand of Frances. "I am but a poor hand at compliments now," she murmured, "but I entreat you to believe, Frances, that you have my best wishes for your welfare, as sincerely as I wished it for my own child. May you and Mr. Castonel be ever happy."

About this time rumours began to be circulated in Ebury that a medical gentleman, who was formerly in practice in it, was about to return.

"You had better take care of your p's and q's," cried old

Flockaway one day to Mr. Rice. "If it's true that Ailsa is coming back, I wouldn't give a hundred a year for the practice that will be left for Mr. Castonel."

"How so?" demanded the assistant-surgeon, who had been a stranger to the place when Mr. Ailsa was in it. "Mr. Castonel is liked here."

"Liked in other folks' absence," groaned old Flockaway, who was a martyr to gout. "He has had nobody to oppose him, so has had full swing. But just let Ailsa come, and you'll see. All Ebury will tell you that Castonel is not fit to tie his shoe-strings."

"I suppose there is room for both of them."

"There'll be more room for one than the other," persisted the martyr. "If a royal duke came and set up doctoring here he'd get no custom against Ailsa."

The news proved true; and Mr. Ailsa and his family arrived at his house, which had been let during his absence. An unassuming, gentlemanlike man, with a placid countenance. "Little Tuck," his usual appellation, an undersized little fellow with a squeaking voice, who had once been an apprentice under Mr. Ailsa, was the first to run in to see him.

"We are all so glad to see you back, sir," he said, insensibly falling into his old, respectful mode of speech. "Mrs. Ailsa is looking well too."

"I am well," she answered. "No more need of foreign climates for me. But you must have plenty of news to tell us about Ebury."

"Oh, law!" ecboed little Tuck. "I shan't know where to begin. First of all, I am living here. Second assistant to Mr. Castonel."

"You had set up for yourself in Brenton when I left," observed the surgeon.

"Yes, but it didn't answer," replied Mr. Tuck, with a doleful look. "I'm afraid I kept too many horses. So I

thought the shortest way would be to cut it, before any smash came; and I sold off and came over here, and hired myself out to Mr. Castonel."

"He has played a conspicuous part in Ebury, has he not, this Mr. Castonel?"

"Yes, he has. He came dashing down here from London, with a cab and a tiger and two splendid horses; and got all the practice away from poor old Winnington, and married his niece against his will. When Mr. Winnington died, folks said it was of a broken heart."

"And then she died, did she not?" said Mrs. Ailsa.

"She did. Mr. Castonel's next move was to run away with Ellen Leicester. And she died."

"What did they die of?" asked the doctor.

"I can't tell you," replied Mr. Tuck. "I asked Rice one day, and he said he never knew; he could not make it out. They had both been ill but were recovering, and went off suddenly in convulsions. And now he has married Frances Chavasse."

"I should have felt afraid to risk him," laughed Mrs. Ailsa.

"Oh, was she, though!" responded the little man. "She and her mother were all cock-a-hoop over it, and have looked down on Ebury ever since. They'll hardly speak to me in the street. Frances served out poor Hurst, I'm afraid. I know he was wild after her."

"Who is Hurst?"

"The curate. Poor Mr. Leicester is no longer able to take duty. Ellen's running away with Mr. Castonel nearly did him up, and her death finished it. I fear he is on his last legs."

"What sort of a man is this Mr. Castonel? Do you like him?"

"*I* don't. I don't understand him."

"Not understand him?"

"I don't," repeated Mr. Tuck, with a very decided shake of the head. "I don't understand him. He has a look of the eye that's queer. I wish you would take me on as assistant, Mr. Ailsa. I'd come to you for the half he gives me. You'll get plenty of practice back. People will be glad to return to you; for, somehow, Mr. Castonel has gone down in favour. They talk more about that strange woman."

Mr. Ailsa looked up. "What are you speaking of?"

"Well, when Mr. Castonel first came down here she followed him, and brought a maid with her, and she has lived ever since in Beech Lodge, Squire Hardwick's gamekeeper's, formerly."

"Who is she?"

"There's the puzzle. She is young, and very handsome, and quite a lady. Mr. Castonel gives out that it's a relation. He goes to see her, but nobody else does."

"Curious!" remarked Mr. Ailsa.

"By the way, you remember Mary Shipley, ma'am?"

"Yes, indeed," returned Mrs. Ailsa. "Mary was a good girl. I would have taken her abroad with me, if she could have left her father."

"Lucky for her if you had, ma'am," was the blunt rejoinder of Mr. Tuck, "for she has gone all wrong."

"Gone wrong! Mary?"

"And Mr. Castonel gets the blame. But he is a sly fellow, and some people think him a lamb. Mary tells nothing, but she appears to be sinking into a decline."

"I am grieved to hear this," returned Mrs. Ailsa. "Her mother was nurse at the Hall when we were children, and she named Mary after me."

"It appears to me," observed Mr. Ailsa, arousing himself from a reverie, "that your friend Mr. Castonel has not brought happiness to Ebury, take it all in all."

"He has brought plenty of unhappiness and plenty of death," replied Mr. Tuck. "I don't say it is his fault," added the little man, "but it's certainly his misfortune."

"What a row there is over this Ailsa!" exclaimed Mr. Castonel as he sat down that same night with his wife. "Tuck looked in just now, dancing mad with excitement, because 'Mr. Ailsa was come, and he had been in to see him.' Who is Ailsa, pray?"

"You know, Gervase; you have often heard of him lately," replied Mrs. Castonel, answering the letter rather than the spirit of the words. "Every one is saying he will take your practice from you; even mamma thinks he will prove a formidable rival."

"What is there in him to be formidable?" slightingly returned Mr. Castonel. "I'll sew him up, Frances, as I did old Winnington."

"If you mean to imply ruin by 'sewing-up,' I think not," laughed Mrs. Castonel. "He has a large fortune, and his wife is connected with half the great people of the county. She was Miss Hardwick, of the Hall, and the nicest girl in the world."

The popular opinion as to Mr. Ailsa's success was not groundless: for of eighteen patients who fell ill in the next three weeks, counting rich and poor, seventeen of them went to Mr. Ailsa, though he never solicited a single case.

How the world would get on without gossip few people can tell. One day Mrs. Major Acre, who was by no means a taciturn or a cautious woman, paid a visit to Mrs. Castonel. "Now, my dear," she said to Frances, "I should recommend Mr. Castonel to call Ailsa out."

Frances glanced at her with an amused look. "Oh, the patients will come back to my husband. They will not all remain with James Ailsa."

"I don't mean that," returned Mrs. Major Acre. "Some stupid people have gone over to him, but you can't call a man out for the caprices of others. No, my dear. But James Ailsa has made very free remarks upon your husband."

"Indeed!"

"It seems Mrs. Ailsa has wormed out of Mary Shipley who it was that led her into mischief—you know the Hardwicks always took an interest in those Shipleys—and Mary has confessed to Mrs. Ailsa what she never would to any one else."

"And who was it?" asked Frances.

"Mr. Castonel."

A vivid fire rushed into the cheeks of Frances.

"And I hear Ailsa declares that, had he been in Ebury at the time, he should have taken upon himself to bring Mr. Castonel before the justices for it. They have forbidden her to let him go there any more."

"He does not go there," cried Frances, vehemently.

"I wouldn't take an oath one way or the other, but if he does, child, he wouldn't be likely to tell you," observed the senseless old lady. "There's no answering for men. My dead husband had a saying of his own, that he was fond of treating his brother officers to, 'Do anything you like, boys, but never let the women know it.' Meaning us wives, my dear."

Frances sat as one stupefied.

"And now I am going on to your mamma's, and——".

"Oh, pray do not say anything of this to mamma," interrupted Frances, rising in excitement. "She would write word to papa, and—— Pray do not, Mrs. Acre!"

"As you please, child. If I don't, other people will. It's known all over Ebury."

When Mr. Castonel entered, Frances met him with

passion. "You have deceived me throughout!" she cried—"you have deceived papa! And rather than be a dupe, I would leave you and go home to live again. Papa would not let me remain here. I know his sentiments. He spoke to me about this very subject, and begged me not to marry you till it was cleared up. I will not remain here."

Mr. Castonel looked, as the saying is, taken by storm. "What on earth is the matter, Frances? I am guilty of no deceit."

"Equivocation will only make matters worse. Oh, I shall go mad! I shall go mad! To think that people should be able to say the same of me that they did of Caroline Hall and Ellen Leicester!"

Mr. Castonel's countenance flushed red, and then became deadly pale. He faltered forth, rather than spoke—"And what did they say of Caroline and Ellen?"

"That you neglected them for others."

"Oh!" The perfectly negligent tone of the ejaculation, and the relieved and half-mocking face, did not tend to calm the anger of Mrs. Castonel.

"I know the truth now about Mary Shipley. It has been disclosed to me to-day. Papa questioned you on that report himself, and you denied that there was any truth in it."

"There was no truth in it," was the calm reply of Mr. Castonel. "Why did you not tell me what you meant before exciting yourself thus, Frances? I could have reassured you."

We will leave Mr. Castonel to his reassuring, merely observing that he did succeed in his task; and so fully, that his wife was ready to go down on her knees for having doubted him. Verily he possessed some subtle power, did Mr. Castonel.

June came in, and strange, strange to say, news went out to Ebury of the illness of Mrs. Castonel. Strange, because

her symptoms were the same as those which had attacked Mr. Castonel's first and second wives, destroying prospects of an heir.

Mrs. Chavasse arrived in hot haste. Frances laughed at her perturbation. "You have sent for Mr. Ailsa, of course," said Mrs. Chavasse.

"Mr. Ailsa shall attend no wife of mine," was the determined rejoinder of the surgeon. "I'll see him in his coffin first."

"Listen, Mr. Castonel. You have lost two wives; it may have been through negligence in not having good advice; I know not. You shall not lose my daughter if I can prevent it. Not an hour shall go over without further advice."

"Call in any medical man you please, except Ailsa," said Mr. Castonel. "I should wish it done."

"You have taken a prejudice against him," retorted Mrs. Chavasse. "None are so desirable, because he is on the spot."

"Ailsa shall never darken my doors. I will send an express to the county town for one or other of the physicians. Which will you have?"

"Dr. Wilson," answered Mrs. Chavasse. "And meanwhile let Mr. Rice come in."

So it was done. Mr. Rice paid a visit to Mrs. Castonel, and declared she was in no danger whatever.

"I hope not," said Mrs. Chavasse. "I think not. But past events are enough to terrify me."

"True," assented Mr. Rice.

Dr. Wilson came in the course of the day. "No danger," he said; just as Mr. Rice had done.

The following day, however, Mrs. Castonel was worse; and the day after that her life was despaired of. Her own state of excitement contributed to the danger. She woke up that morning from a doze, and whether she had dreamt

anything to terrify her was uncertain, but she started up in bed, her eyes glaring wildly. Mr. Castonel was then alone with her.

"Oh, Gervase, I am in danger! I know I am in danger!"

"My dear, no." For of course it was his duty to soothe her. "Calm yourself, Frances."

"Oh!" she cried, clasping him in deep distress, "can I be going to die? Must I indeed follow Ellen Leicester? I who have thought nothing of death—who deemed it so far off."

"Be quiet, Frances; I insist upon it," he angrily exclaimed. "You will do yourself incalculable mischief."

"*What will my doom be?* Gervase, do you remember my dream? What have I done that I should be cut off in the midst of my happiness? But not without warning. That dream was my warning, and I neglected it!"

"Frances——"

"Yet what had they done, Caroline and Ellen? Oh, Gervase, save me! what will you do without me? Save me, save me! Let not this terrible fate be mine."

Mr. Castonel strove to hold her still, but she shook terribly; and as to stopping her words, he might as well have tried to stem a torrent in its course.

"The grave! the grave! the grave for *me!* I who have lived but in pleasure!"

"My dear Frances, what are you raving about? If you have lived in pleasure, it has been innocent pleasure."

"Oh yes, innocent in itself. If I had but thought of God with it, and striven to please Him; and I never did! *There* lay the sin; not in the pleasure. Oh, save me! Fetch Dr. Wilson. I must not die."

They calmed her after awhile, and for a day or two her life hung upon a thread. Then she began to get slowly better. But they were anxious faces still, those around her

bedside, her husband's, her mother's, good old Mrs. Muff's; for they remembered it was when they were apparently recovering that the first and the second Mrs. Castonel had died. A few more days, and Frances sat up in her dressing-room, gay as ever. All danger was really over, and Mrs. Chavasse returned home.

"Gervase," she said, taking her husband's hand, "how foolish I was to frighten myself!"

"Ay, you were, Frances. But you would not listen to me then, when I told you so."

"I may go into the drawing-room to-morrow, and see visitors, may I not?"

"To be sure you may."

"Then ring the bell, please. I must send Hannah to order me a very pretty cap."

It was Mrs. Muff who answered it, not Hannah. Mr. Castonel left the room as she came in.

"I am to go into the drawing-room to-morrow," said Mrs. Castonel. "Do you know it?"

"Yes, ma'am. I heard Mr. Rice say you might."

"And admit visitors."

"I did not hear him say that, but I should think there's no reason against it," replied the housekeeper.

"So I'll tell you what I want done," added Mrs. Castonel. "Hannah must go to the milliners' and desire them to send me some afternoon caps, to choose one from. If they have none ready they must make me one. Something simple and elegant. Shall I have it trimmed with white or pink?"

Mrs. Muff thought pink, as her mistress was just now so pale.

"Yes, pink; nothing suits my complexion so well as pink," cried Frances, all her old vanity in full force. "Send Hannah immediately. I am impatient to try it on."

The cap came, but not until night, and Frances had a glass

brought to her, and sat figuring off before it, declaring she had never looked so well: if she were but a little older, she would take to caps for good. Mr. Castonel looked on, and laughed at her.

"It is getting time for you to be in bed, Frances," he said. "You must not presume too much upon your recovery."

"I am not tired in the least," she replied. "I will not go until I have had my supper. I never felt better."

"Do you know who they say is dying?" he resumed.

"No."

"Mr. Leicester."

"Mr. Leicester!"

"It is thought to be his last night. So, I hear, is the opinion of his friend and chum, Ailsa."

Mrs. Castonel did not like the tone. "Poor man! poor Mr. Leicester!" she sighed. "Well, they have had their share of sorrow. How papa and mamma would have grieved for me: I have thought of it since my illness: and we are many of us, whilst Ellen was their only child. I wonder who will have the living? I hope it will be some nice sociable young person."

"I hope it will be anybody rather than Mr. Hurst," said the surgeon, spitefully.

"What happy days we shall have together again, Gervase!" she went on. "What should you have done if I had died!"

"The best I could," answered Mr. Castonel.

At that moment Mrs. Muff came in with a light supper for her mistress, and remained with her whilst she took it, Mr. Castonel descending to his laboratory. As she was carrying down the waiter again, a ring came to the door-bell, and John brushed past to answer it.

"Mr. Castonel at home?"

"Safe and sound," was the tiger's rejoinder, for the applicant was a page in buttons of his acquaintance.

"Then he must come as fast as he can pelt to missis. She's in a fit."

"You are wanted at Mrs. Major Acre's directly, sir," said John, hastily entering the laboratory. "She's took in a fit."

Mr. Castonel had taken out one of the little drawers—to John's amazement. For the lad had always believed that particular drawer to be a sham drawer. There appeared to be a paper or two in it, and a phial. The latter the surgeon held in his hand, and in reply to the message he muttered something, which, to John's ears, sounded very like strong language.

"I never knew, sir, as that drawer opened. I——"

"Begone!" thundered Mr. Castonel, turning on his servant a look so full of evil, that the young man bounded backwards some yards.

"Am I to go anywhere?" he stammered, not understanding.

"Go out and find Mr. Rice," raved his master. "Send him to Mrs. Acre's."

Scarcely had John departed, when there came a second messenger for Mr. Castonel. "If he did not go at once, Mrs. Major Acre would be dead." Thus pressed, he took his hat and hurried out, after waiting a minute to put things straight in the laboratory. Mr. Rice, however, had arrived at Mrs. Major Acre's, and Mr. Castonel returned home.

On the following morning, Mrs. Leicester and Mr. Ailsa stood around the rector's dying bed. He lay partially insensible: had so lain ever since daylight. "Do you not think Dr. Wilson late?" whispered Mrs. Leicester. "It is half-past seven."

"I expected him before this," replied Mr. Ailsa. "But, dear Mrs. Leicester, he can do no good."

"I know it," she answered, through her tears.

At that moment there rang out the deep tones of the passing-bell, denoting that an immortal soul had been called away. One of the chamber windows was open, to admit air, and the sound came booming in from the opposite church. It aroused the rector.

"Have my people mistaken the moment of my departure?" he murmured. "Or is that one of my fellow-brethren is called with me?"

Mrs. Leicester leaned over him, and gently spoke, her ear having noted the strokes more accurately than that of the dying man. "It must be, I fear, for Mrs. Acre. It is for a woman."

"I fancy not for Mrs. Acre," observed Mr. Ailsa. "Mr. Rice left her, last night, out of danger."

It was striking out now, fast and loud. Mrs. Leicester noticed her husband's anxious eye. "Who goes with me?" he panted—"who goes with me?" and, just then, little Tuck stole into the room, with a whitened face.

"Who is the bell tolling for?" asked Mrs. Leicester.

"For Mrs. Castonel. She died in the night."

With a sharp cry, the rector struggled up in bed. What fear, what horror was it that distorted his countenance, as he grasped Mr. Ailsa's arm and strove to speak? They never knew, for he fell back speechless.

"Oh, where can Dr. Wilson be?" sobbed Mrs. Leicester. "Why is he not here?"

"He will not be long," whispered Mr. Tuck. "He was met outside the village, and taken to Mrs. Chavasse. The shock has brought on an attack of paralysis. Poor Castonel, Rice says, is in a lamentable state."

"What did she die of?" marvelled Mr. Ailsa.

"What did the others die of?" retorted Mr. Tuck. "Convulsions of some sort. Nobody knows. I never heard of such an unlucky man."

He was interrupted by a movement from Mrs. Leicester. The minister's spirit had passed away.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAME VAUGHAN'S WONDER.

It was the brightest day possible, and the sun shone on Ebury churchyard gaily and hotly. The two funerals had been arranged for the same day: but not intentionally. The bell had tolled from an early hour in the morning, out of respect to its regretted minister. Mr. Leicester's interment was fixed for ten o'clock, Mrs. Castonel's for eleven; consequently, no sooner had the clock struck nine, than stragglers began to move towards the churchyard, and soon they increased to groups, and soon to a crowd. All Ebury went there, and more than Ebury. They talked to one another (as though seeking an excuse) of paying the last tribute of respect to their many-years rector, but there was a more powerful inducement in their hearts—that of witnessing the funeral of Mr. Castonel's wife, and of staring at him.

All the well-dressed people, and all who possessed pews, entered the church, until it was crammed in every nook, scarcely leaving room for the coffins to pass up the aisle. The mob held possession of the churchyard, and there was not an inch of land, no, nor of a grave, on which people were not standing.

They saw it file out of the rectory and cross the road, a simple funeral, Mr. Hurst officiating. The coffin was borne by eight labourers, old parishioners, and the mourners followed with many friends, Squire Hardwick, of the Hall, and

Mr. Ailsa walking next the relatives. And so the body was consigned to the ground, and the traces of the first funeral passed away.

But what was that, compared with the show which followed? With its mutes, its feathers, its black chariots, its hearse, its mourning coaches, its velvet trappings, its pall-bearers, its trailing-scarfs and hatbands, its white handkerchiefs! The mutes alone, with their solemn faces and staffs of office, struck dumb the fry of infantry who had congregated amongst their elders.

"Look at him! look at him!" whispered the mob as Mr. Castonel moved up the path by slow degrees after the body, beadle and sexton clearing the way with difficulty. "Don't he look white? The handkercher he's a covering his face with ain't whiter."

"Enough to make him. He——"

"Hush-sh-sh! See who's a following of him! It's Mr. Chavasse. Sobbing like a child, for all he be such a great stout gentleman!"

"But Mr. Chavasse were still in foreign parts, and knowed nothing o' the death!"

"They sent him word, I heerd. And he come over the sea in a carriage and six, to be in time for it, and got here at half-after nine this morning. How he's a-crying!"

"And his eldest son walking with him, and Master Arthur and the other behind, all crying too. Poor things!"

"It seems but yesterday that Miss Chavasse come here in Lord Eastbury's carriage, like a queen. Who so proud as she, in her veils and her feathers?"

"Queens die as well as other folks. It's said Mrs. Chavasse won't be long after her. She have had a shocking seizure."

"Well, it's a fearsome thing for the poor young lady to have been cut off so sudden."

"It were as fearsome a thing for the other two. And worse. For Miss Chavasse might have took warning by them, and not have had him."

"I know what I know," interrupted Dame Vaughan, who made one of the spectators. "That I should like to clear up what it was as did cut 'em off."

Murmurs were arising amongst the crowd. "Ay, what was it? what took 'em?"

"What took that baby of Mary Shipley's, as was lying safe and well on my knee two minutes afore it went into the agony?" persisted Dame Vaughan. "I have not forgot that, if others has. The physic I give to it was supplied from Mr. Castonel's stock."

"I heerd," broke in a young girl, "as this Mrs. Castonel died of convulsions."

"So they all did, so they all did. The wretch! the murr——"

"Come, come, you women," interrupted a man, "this ain't law nor gospel. Keep civil tongues in your heads."

But the cue had been given, the popular feeling arose, and hisses, groans, and ill words were poured upon Mr. Castonel. He could not look whiter or more impenetrable than he had done before, but he doubtless wished the beadle put to the torture for not forcing a passage more quickly that he might get inside the church. As soon as that object was attained, the beadle rushed back amongst the crowd, and used his tongue and his stick vigorously; and what with that, and his formidable cocked-hat, he succeeded in enforcing silence.

So Frances, Mrs. Castonel, was laid in her grave, like unto the two fair flowers who had gone before her, and the procession returned, in its course, and disappeared. And the mob disappeared in its wake after winding up with three groans for Mr. Castonel.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. TUCK'S FRIGHT.

THE churchyard was gradually emptying itself of a mass of human beings, for two funerals had taken place there; two bodies had been consigned to their parent earth till the grave should yield up its dead. One was that of the rector of the place, a man of years and sorrow; the other that of a young and lovely woman; and it was in the last that the attraction lay.

A gentleman who had attended the funeral of the rector made his way, as the mob dispersed, towards the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Chavasse, the parents of the ill-fated young lady just interred. It was Mr. Ailsa. He had been called in to Mrs. Chavasse; for the fearful shock of her daughter's death had brought on an attack of paralysis. The medical men had no fears for her life, but they knew she would remain a paralyzed cripple; that she had suddenly passed from a gay, middle-aged matron, to a miserable, decrepit old woman.

As Mr. Ailsa was passing down the stairs from her chamber, a door was pushed open, his hand was grasped, and he was pulled into the darkened parlour. It was by Mr. Chavasse, who tried to speak, but failed, and, sitting down, sobbed like a child. It was the first time they had met for years; for, since Ailsa's return, Mr. Chavasse had been away in Scotland, examining into some agricultural

improvements, with the Earl of Eastbury, to whom he was land-steward. The news of his daughter's death had brought him home.

"Oh, Ailsa, my dear friend, could you not have saved her?"

"I was not her attendant," was Mr. Ailsa's reply. "Mr. Rice and Dr. Wilson no doubt did all they could; not to speak of her husband."

"Is it true that she was recovering? I know nothing. I only reached here in time for the funeral, and my wife is not in a state to give particulars, even if she knows them."

"I hear that she was getting well. She had been ill, as you are probably aware, but had recovered so far as to be out of danger."

"Entirely so?"

"As Mr. Rice tells me."

"And then she was taken suddenly with convulsions."

Mr. Ailsa nodded.

"And died. As the other wives had died."

Mr. Ailsa sat silent.

"Did you ever hear of three wives, the wives of one man, having been thus attacked? Did you *ever* hear of so strange a coincidence?"

"Not to my recollection."

"And that when they were recovering, as they all were, that they should suddenly die of convulsions?"

Mr. Ailsa looked distressed.

"Do you know," added Mr. Chavasse, lowering his voice, "the thought crossed my mind this morning to stop the funeral. But somehow I shrank from the hubbub it would have caused: and my grief had such full hold upon me. I said to myself, 'If I do cause an inquiry, it will not bring my child back to life.'"

"Very true," murmured Mr. Ailsa.

"Had I arrived yesterday, perhaps I should have entered upon it; I am sure I should, had I been here when she died. Speak your thoughts, Ailsa, between ourselves; see you no cause for suspicion?"

"I do not like to answer your question," replied Mr. Ailsa. "Castonel is no personal friend of mine; I have never spoken to him: but we professional men are not fond of encouraging reflections upon each other."

"Have you heard of that business at Thomas Shipley's, about the child dying in the strange manner it did?"

"Mrs. Ailsa has heard the particulars from Mary; and Dame Vaughan seized upon me the other day, and spoke of them."

"Well, was not that a suspicious thing?"

"I think it was a very extraordinary one. But the medicine was made up and sent by Mr. Rice, not by Mr. Castonel."

"The fact is this, Ailsa. Each event, each death, taken by itself, would give rise to no suspicion; but when you come to add them together, and look upon them collectively, it is then the mind is staggered. I wish," added Mr. Chavasse, musingly, "I knew the full particulars of my child's death: the details, as they took place."

"You surely can learn them from Mr. Castonel."

"Would he tell them?"

"Yes. If he be an innocent man."

"If! Do you know," whispered Mr. Chavasse, "that they groaned at and hissed him in the churchyard to-day, calling him poisoner?"

"No!"

"They did. "What a fool I was," he continued, wringing his hands, "ever to let her have Castonel! It was my wife worried me into it. Ailsa, I must get at the particulars of her death-bed. I shall not rest until I do. If Castonel will not furnish them, I'll ask them of Mrs. Muff."

Mr. Chavasse remained irresolute all the day. At sunset he stole through the twilight to the house of his son-in-law. But Mr. Castonel had also stolen out somewhere, under cover of the night. The faithful upper servant and housekeeper of *all* the Mrs. Castonels came to him in the dining-room, and the two sat down and sobbed together.

"What did she die of?" groaned Mr. Chavasse.

"Sir," said Mrs. Muff, "I know no more than you. When she went to bed she was as well as I was, and ten times merrier, talking about a new cap she had ordered, and the visitors she would see on the morrow. That was about half-past nine, and by eleven we were all in bed in the house. In the middle of the night—if you killed me, I couldn't tell you the time, for in my flurry I never looked, but it may have been about two—their bedroom bell, the one which is hung by John's door on the top landing, in case Mr. Castonel is called out and wants him in the night, rang out such a dreadful peal, loud and long, as brought us all out of our rooms; and master was shouting from his chamber. The others stopped to put a few things on, but I ran down in my night-clothes. Sir, in ten minutes Mrs. Castonel was dead."

"How did she seem when you got to her? How did she look?"

"She was writhing on the bed in awful agony, screaming and flinging her arms about. Mr. Castonel called it convulsions. I suppose it was. It was just as the other two poor young ladies went off. He was in a terrible state, and threw himself on the body afterwards, and sobbed as if his heart would break."

"Did she take anything in the night?"

"Nothing, except some barley-water. She had drunk that, for the glass was empty."

"Mrs. Muff," he whispered, taking her hand with a

beseeching look, "do you feel that there has always been fair play?"

"The merciful goodness knows, sir. I can't help asking myself all sorts of ugly questions, and then I am vexed at doing it. I know one thing; that it's an unlucky house, and as soon as to-morrow comes I take myself out of it. I could not stay. Mr. Castonel owes me three months' wages, and if he says I have no right to them, for leaving without warning, why, he must keep them. Hannah, neither, won't stay. I had hard work to make her remain for the funeral."

"You saw them all after death. How did they look?"

"I saw them all, and noticed nothing extraordinary. But Mr. Castonel had the coffins screwed down quickly."

"Has anything ever happened to excite your suspicions?"

"I cannot say it has. Though one circumstance has been much in my mind the last few days. The evening of the death of the first Mrs. Castonel, I and Hannah were seated in the kitchen when we heard a noise in the laboratory. I went to see, and there was Mr. Castonel, who must have stolen downstairs and gone in without noise. He had let fall one of the little drawers, and I saw a phial and a paper or two on the floor. He was in a fierce rage with me for looking in. But the curious part is, that he had always passed off that drawer for a dummy drawer."

Mr. Chavasse did not speak. He listened eagerly.

"And on the night of your poor daughter's death, sir, he had got that same drawer out again. John went in, and saw him with it, and Mr. Castonel—to use the lad's words—howled at him and chivied him back again. 'What an odd thing it is, Mrs. Muff,' said he to me, that same evening, 'that I should always have took that drawer for a sham!'"

"Did you notice him at the drawer when his second wife died, poor Ellen Leicester?"

"No. But he may have gone to it every day of his life without my seeing him. The curious point is, that he should have been seen at it on these two particular nights, and by neither of us at any other time. Oh, sir, whether it has been bad luck, or whether it has been anything worse, what a mercy if this man had never come near Ebury!"

"It would have been a mercy indeed," echoed poor Mr. Chavasse.

On the following afternoon John was in the laboratory, when Mr. Rice and Mr. Tuck came in.

"Here's a pretty state of things," exclaimed the tiger. "Mother Muff's gone off, and Hannah's gone off, leaving me, and master, and Ralph in the house, to do the work for ourselves."

"Gone off!" echoed Mr. Rice. "What for?"

"You must ask 'em that," returned the tiger. "Hannah said the house smelt of poison."

"Psha!" exclaimed Mr. Rice. "Go with this mixture to Mrs. Major Acre's."

"I tell you what," cried little Tuck, as John went out, "Mr. Castonel will find it no pleasant matter. It must be a dreadful cut-up to the feelings to have an inquiry pending whether you have not carried on a wholesale system of poisoning."

"What do you mean?" cried Mr. Rice, staring at him.

"Chavasse is bent on an inquiry. He has taken some suspicion in his head, about foul play. So the body is to come up, and an inquest to be held."

"Mrs. Castonel's body?" cried Mr. Rice, quickly. "Nonsense!"

"Mrs. Castonel the third. And if they find anything queer, Mrs. Castonel the second and Mrs. Castonel the first will follow. While they are about it, too, they may disinter that child of Mary Shipley's."

"Where did you hear all this?" demanded Mr. Rice, incredulously.

"Oh, I heard it. Mr. Chavasse was wavering over it yesterday, but he has been at the Hall to-day, and laid his suspicions and information before Squire Hardwick. I say, you see this set of drawers?"

"Well?" resumed Mr. Rice, casting up his eyes.

"There's something up, about that top one being a secret drawer and not a dummy; and they say it has got something inside it that won't do to be looked at."

"I do not believe it is a drawer," observed Mr. Rice. "I never knew it was."

"Nor I," rejoined little Tuck. "Hand me the steps, will you. I'll have a look."

"Let the steps alone, and the drawer too," said Mr. Rice. "Whether it's wrong or right, we need not draw ourselves into the affair. Better keep out of it."

"Well, perhaps you are right. What do you think Mr. Francis Hardwick said?"

"I had rather not hear. How was old Flockaway?"

"My!" ejaculated little Tuck. "I never went. I forgot it."

"Then I'll go now. I suppose this gossip put it out of your head."

"It did. I say though, Rice, isn't it a horrid go for Castonel?"

It must have been a "horrid go" for Mr. Castonel to hear this; and hear it he did, for he was seated outside the open window. Had he placed himself there to listen? No one had ever known him to sit down on the bench before.

Mr. Rice left the house, and Mr. Tuck cast his eyes on the drawers. He was a good-natured, harmless little fellow, but liked to indulge his curiosity. "Shall I look, or shall I not?" soliloquized he. "There's an old proverb that says 'Discretion is the better part of valour.' Oh, bother discretion! Here goes. There's nobody at home to see me."

He set the steps against the case of drawers, and mounted up, his eager hand outstretched. But at that moment a head and shoulders slowly rose before the window, and Mr. Tuck, in his fright, and the steps, nearly came down together. For it was Mr. Castonel.

"Are you searching for anything?" equably demanded Mr. Castonel.

"Nothing, sir," stammered Mr. Tuck, putting up the steps very humbly.

"Come out here," said Mr. Castonel.

Mr. Tuck went out. Had he been detected poisoning Mr. Castonel, he could hardly have felt more ashamed, more unjustifiably prying. Mr. Castonel made room for him on the bench beside him.

"I thought you were out, sir," he awkwardly began.

"No," answered Mr. Castonel. "I sat down here an hour ago, and"—he coughed—"dropped asleep. Your voice, talking with Mr. Rice, awoke me."

"Oh, my heart!" groaned Mr. Tuck to himself, becoming very hot. "He must have heard all we said. Did you, sir?" he asked aloud, following out his thoughts.

"Did I what?" demanded Mr. Castonel, turning upon him his sinister eye. He knew he had got him safe—that simple little Tuck was no match for him.

"Hear the—the—stuff—that I and Rice were saying?"

"I heard the stuff *you* were saying," curtly rejoined Mr. Castonel.

"Of course I ought not to have repeated it, sir; but it

will be all over the village to-morrow, without me. I am very sorry for it."

"So am I," responded Mr. Castonel. "Sorry that people should be such fools."

"And I hope it will be cleared up," added Mr. Tuck.

"You do not believe there is anything to clear up, do you?" almost savagely retorted Mr. Castonel.

"I meant the reports," deprecated little Tuck.

"But I asked you if you believe there can be to clear up?" repeated Mr. Castonel.

"No, sir, not now that I am talking with you. I don't know whether I believed it or not, up at the Hall. I was struck all in a maze there."

"What brought you at the Hall?"

"They sent for me."

"Who?"

"Squire Hardwick. No; stop; I think it was Mr. Chavasse. Or the two together: I don't know."

"What for?"

Mr. Tuck hesitated.

"I am a wrongfully accused man," burst forth Mr. Castonel. "Even you were ready enough, but now, to accuse me to Rice. Who is it that is asking for a coroner's inquest?"

"Mr. Chavasse."

"Upon what grounds? Speak up. Don't equivocate."

"I am not equivocating, sir," cried little Tuck. "And as you heard what I said to Mr. Rice, you know the chief facts. But I don't like to repeat these things to your face."

"I wish you to repeat them. I must know what they charge me with. An innocent man can listen to slander unmoved.

"And you *are* innocent!" cried Mr. Tuck, brightening up.

"Innocent! Innocent of the death of my dear wives! I would have died to save them."

"Then I'll tell you all I did hear, sir," answered simple, credulous little Tuck. "Mr. Chavasse has got something in his head about Mrs.——your late wife."

"Got what? Speak out."

"He says he wants to prove whether she came fairly by her death. Perhaps," added Mr. Tuck, in a conciliating tone, for he did shrink from his present task—"perhaps he fears something may have been given to her by mistake."

"No innuendoes," was the rough answer. "I shan't wince. He fears I may have poisoned her, that's what it is."

"Well," warmly cried little Tuck, "*I* don't fear it now."

"Who went to Francis Hardwick's?"

"Mr. Chavasse was there, and they had me up, and Mrs. Muff; and the Squire asked Mr. Ailsa to be present, that he might judge whether there were medical grounds to go upon. And Dame Vaughan came up——"

"Why did not Francis Hardwick have the whole parish up?" angrily interrupted the surgeon.

"Dame Vaughan was not sent for. She went of her own accord. Mr. Chavasse had met her in the morning, and asked her something, and she went up. It was about those powders that she complained, when Mary Shipley's child died. She had nothing to say about Mrs. Castonel. She vowed those powders were poison."

"Mr. Rice made them up and sent them, whatever they were."

"But Dame Vaughan said Mr. Castonel might have changed what Mr. Rice made up. She said, in fact, she'd almost be upon her oath he did, and that she had asked John, who said it was Mr Castonel gave the powders into his hand, and that Mr. Rice was not present. Mr. Ailsa

said he never heard a woman go on so, and the Squire threatened to turn her out of the justice-room unless she could be calm."

"Did you hear her?"

"Of course not. They had us in, one at a time, to the justice-room—as the poor call it. The Squire and Mr. Ailsa sat together at the table, and Mr. Chavasse sat on that low bench under the window, with his head bent on to his knees. Dame Vaughan has an awful tongue. She said she was an old fool; and, if she had not been one, the wickedness would have been brought to light at the time."

Mr. Castonel looked up sharply. "She is a fool. What did she mean?"

"Why, she said she gave the remaining four powders into your hands, after the baby died; and let you take them into the yard, by yourself, at Shipley's cottage, so that you had plenty of time to—to——"

"To what? Speak out, I say again."

"To walk off with the poison, and leave wholesome powders in its stead. She said, also——"

"Go on," laughed Mr. Castonel, apparently quite at his ease. Much more so than his assistant, who spoke with frequent hesitation.

"That you must have planted yourself purposely in the boy's way, who went after you, so as to run down to Thomas Shipley's and secure the poison, before Mr. Rice or anybody could come."

"She's a lady!" ironically uttered Mr. Castonel.

"She is that," responded little Tuck. "She protested she would dig the baby up with her own hands, without any spade, if the magistrates would but go into the matter. Squire Hardwick told her it was quite an after consideration whether they went into it at all, and that it had nothing to do with the subject under notice."

"I'll 'dig' her!" uttered Mr. Castonel. "What did they ask Mrs. Muff?"

"I don't know what they asked her, but I believe she was cautious, and couldn't or wouldn't say one way or the other whether she suspected or not. Oh—and who else do you think came to the Hall?"

"All Ebury, probably."

"Mrs. Leicester."

"Mrs. Leicester! Who next? What did she want?"

"Mrs. Leicester, in her widow's weeds. She was in there, ever so long, with Mr. Chavasse, and the Squire, and Ailsa. Mr. Chavasse had been to the rectory and had an interview with her in the morning, and she came up. We gathered that she objected to Ellen—to Mrs. Cas—to the remains of her daughter being disturbed, and that 'Squire Hardwick promised that they should not be, unless the ends of justice peremptorily demanded it."

"What questions did they ask you?"

"They asked me very few, because I had nothing to tell," replied little Tuck. "When Mr. Chavasse found that I had not interfered with his daughter's illness, in fact had not seen her, he said he was sorry to have troubled me; that they ought to have had Mr. Rice up instead."

"Have they written to the coroner?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Squire Hardwick said the affair looked gravely suspicious, and that an inquest was indispensable. He said—shall I tell you what else he said, sir?"

"Tell! Of course."

"His opinion was, that the fact of three young wives dying in so sudden and mysterious a manner afforded uncommon scope for doubt, even without the attendance of other suspicious circumstances."

"What 'other?'"

"That's more than I can say. Unless he meant what that beldame, Dame Vaughan, set afloat."

"Tush!" scornfully retorted Mr. Castonel. And then he sat for some minutes in a reverie. Little Mr. Tuck rose.

"Do you want me any longer, sir? I have not had my tea."

"No," said the surgeon. "Have you told all?"

"Every word, sir."

"What were you saying to Mr. Rice about that case of drawers?" returned Mr. Castonel, half turning his head towards the spot where they stood.

"Oh, I forgot that; I did indeed. Some of them say that topmost drawer is not a——"

"Don't speak so vaguely. Who?"

"I'm blest if I know who," said Mr. Tuck, after considering. "They asked me, and I said I always took that topmost drawer to be a dummy, but they say it is not; that there's something inside it, and that you had it out the evenings that your wives died. Of course they meant to insinuate that—that——"

"That I keep a subtle poison in it," sneered Mr. Castonel, "and have been dealing it out in doses. Any more?"

"That is all, sir."

"Good. You need not say, outside, that you have told me this. I am glad I know who my enemies are."

"I will not say a word to any one, sir," earnestly replied the little man. "You may rely upon me. Good evening."

Mr. Tuck departed. Mr. Castonel remained on the bench. As the former hastened up the street, thinking what an aspersed man the surgeon was, he encountered Mr. Ailsa.

"Now I'll just ask the question," thought he. "I'm sure if I can let Castonel know anything certain, it is what I ought to do, with so many against him. I say, sir," quoth he aloud, "have they written to the coroner yet?"

"Not yet. Mr. Francis Hardwick wished to confer with a brother magistrate first. Mr. Chavasse did not consult him in his magisterial capacity, but as a friend. He——"

"Are you sure?" interrupted Mr. Tuck.

"Quite sure. If any magistrate has to interfere, it will not be my brother-in-law: he is acting solely as Mr. Chavasse's private friend."

"Perhaps it is not decided that there will be any inquest," said Mr. Tuck, briskly.

"Oh yes, that is decided; Mr. Chavasse demands it. The coroner will be written to to-morrow."

"Do you know, Mr. Ailsa, I do believe Castonel is as innocent as you or I."

"I hope he is. It will be a most horrible blow to all parties interested, should the contrary be proved."

"He says he would have died to save his wives. Oh, he must be innocent."

"I heartily wish he may be. Good evening. I am on my way to see Mrs. Chavasse."

"Will she get better?"

"Better. But never well."

James Ailsa continued his way, and Mr. Tuck continued his. But suddenly he stopped and ruminated.

"Suppose I go back, and tell Castonel at once! That would be one grain of comfort. I know I should want a good many grains if I were in his shoes."

So he turned back to the house of Mr. Castonel. But instead of ringing at the front door, and bringing Mr. Castonel to open it, he walked round to the side of the house and tried the back garden door, which, as he knew, was occasionally left unlocked, though against orders. It was open, and Mr. Tuck went in. Mr. Castonel was not on the bench then, and Mr. Tuck entered the house by the little door next the surgery.

The first object he saw was Mr. Castonel, mounted on the very steps, as he had been, and in the very same place. And he held the "dummy" drawer in one hand, and grasped some papers and a phial with the other.

"Hallo!" cried Mr. Castonel, dashing the papers and phial into it, and the drawer back into its place, as he rapidly descended, "how did you get in? I heard you go away."

"I came in by the garden door."

"Who has done that? Who has dared to leave it unfastened?" raved Mr. Castonel, with his awful glare.

That glare had never yet been turned upon Mr. Tuck. He did not like it, and he confessed afterwards that he felt as if he would prefer to be safe outside the house, rather than alone in it with Mr. Castonel. He had the presence of mind (he called it so) to speak in a careless tone.

"One of the servants, no doubt. Very stupid of them, for boys may get in and steal the gooseberries, little odds to them whether they are green or ripe. I came back to tell you, sir, that they have not written to the coroner. I met Mr. Ailsa as I left here, and put the question to him point-blank, and he said they had not; so I thought you might like to know it. He told me something else too, that Mr. Chavasse did not formally lay a charge before Mr. Francis Hardwick, he only consulted him as a friend."

"Oh!" cried Mr. Castonel.

"Mr. Ailsa supposes they will write to the coroner to-morrow," added Mr. Tuck. "But to-day is one day, and to-morrow is another; and before to-morrow comes they may change their mind, sir, and let the matter drop."

"They may write if they choose," said Mr. Castonel; "I want no favour from them. I have been forcing that drawer out, Tuck," he continued with a cough, "and find there's a paper of magnesia in it, and some hartshorn in a

phial. They must have been there for ages. Ever since the drawers were appropriated when I first came into the house."

"Then you never did have it out, as they say?" eagerly cried Mr. Tuck.

"Not that I have any recollection of. I suppose its not being used must have caused the impression to get abroad that it was a dummy drawer. Had any curious person applied to me upon the point, I could have told them it was *not* a dummy."

"It looks like a dummy," rejoined Mr. Tuck. "It has no knob and no lock to it, like the others. Why has it not?"

"How should I know why?" retorted Mr. Castonel. I did not make the drawers."

"Well, sir, good evening once more," concluded little Tuck. "I thought you might like to hear that there's nothing yet but smoke in the matter."

CHAPTER X.

BEECH LODGE.

A SMALL, but pretty cottage, built in the form of a lodge and so called, stood alone amidst trees, which nearly surrounded it, a whole grove of them, thick and lofty. Had the trees possessed human ears, they might have detected sounds, late that night, inside the cottage: unusual sounds of dispute, and then commotion, and then distress; and afterwards the outer door was flung open, and a woman-servant sprang out of it with a smothered shriek, took her way at utmost speed towards the village, and rang a loud peal at the lodgings of Mr. Rice. That gentleman was just on the point of stepping into bed. He turned to the window, opened it, and looked out in his night-shirt.

"It's here, isn't it, that Mr. Castonel's partner lives?" a woman breathlessly uttered.

"That's near enough. Yes. What's wanted?"

"Oh—I did not know you in the flurry, sir. Please to come this instant to Mr. Castonel. There's not a moment to lose."

"To Mr. Castonel! Where?"

"He is down at Beech Lodge. Make haste, sir, or he may be dead before you come."

"*He* dead! Mr. Castonel! What in the world is the matter with him?"

"Poison, I believe. Please to bring your remedies for it."

"Here"—for she was striding away—"what description of poison?"

"I can't tell. You had better come and see, sir, instead of wasting time."

Full of consternation and alarm, Mr. Rice hurried on a few clothes carelessly, and rushed out only half dressed. He rang at Mr. Castonel's.

"Law bless us!" cried John, in his surprise, as he flung open the door, "I didn't expect you, sir; I thought it was master. I'm a sitting up for him."

Mr. Rice vouchsafed no answer, he was too hurried. He collected what he wanted from the surgery, and turned to the door again.

"Do you know anything of master, sir, whether he ain't a coming home?" demanded the tiger, looking with curiosity at the signs of Mr. Rice's hasty toilet and his equally hasty movements.

"Your master is ill. He has been taken ill at Beech Lodge. Where's Ralph?"

"He's gone to bed, sir."

"Call him up to mind the house, and you come after me down there. You may be useful."

Away sped Mr. Rice again. Just before he turned off to the fields, he met Mr. and Mrs. Ailsa, near to the gate of their own house. They were walking home from the Hall.

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Ailsa.

"I can't stay to tell you," was Mr. Rice's hurried answer, without arresting his steps. "I fear Castonel has destroyed himself. One of those women has been up to me from Beech Lodge. He is there."

"I will go with you; I may be of service," eagerly cried Mr. Ailsa. "How many more tragedies are we to have? Mary, my dear, can you run in alone?"

"Oh yes, yes, James; lose no time."

The two women—the young and handsome lady, about whom so much mystery had existed, and the woman-servant

—were standing outside the Lodge, looking out for Mr. Rice, when the surgeons approached.

"You are too late."

They did not know which spoke, they pressed on indoors. Mr. Rice half turned his head at a noise behind him. It was the tiger, galloping down. In the small sitting-room, stretched on the floor, between the table and the fireplace, was Mr. Castonel. Dead.

The servant followed them into the room. Not so her mistress.

"Too true!" uttered Mr. Rice; "he has committed suicide. What's this?"

He was looking on the table. A decanter of wine and two glasses were there. One of the glasses was full, the other had been emptied. The woman was sobbing violently, and seemed to have lost all idea of caution or self-control.

"I can't say I ever liked him," she said, "but it is horrible to see a man well one minute, and the next die before our eyes."

"What has led to this?" inquired Mr. Rice.

"He came here about eight o'clock, and had a violent quarrel with my mistress. I heard bits of it, here and there."

[illegible] very bitter, and my mistress at length flew into a frenzy, and came to the door and called me in. [illegible] a witness to her words, she said. I had never seen her in such a state before, nor anybody else, and she knelt down and swore a solemn oath that things should go on, in the way they had been going on, no longer, and that she would declare the truth to the world, and force him to acknowledge it, be the consequences what they might. That calmed Mr. Castonel; though, for the matter of that, he had not been so violent, but I think his cold sneers provoked her. He looked at her with a curious expression, and

sat down on the sofa and seemed to be thinking. Then he told me to get the wine and some wine-glasses, and——"

"What are you saying?" interrupted a calm voice, and the mistress of the Lodge appeared. "Any information necessary for these gentlemen I can give myself."

The servant shrank from the room and began talking to John in the kitchen. The lady confronted the surgeons, keeping the table between herself and the body.

"Can you do nothing for him?"

"Nothing, I grieve to say," replied Mr. Ailsa, speaking with involuntary respect, in spite of his prejudices. Whatever may have been that lady's history, she had the bearing and manners of a refined gentlewoman."

"He must have been dead a quarter of an hour," added Mr. Rice. "Did he wilfully poison himself?"

"No," was the lady's calm answer.

Mr. Rice paused, probably in surprise. "Then could it have been taken in mistake?"

"Neither that. I gave it him."

They both stood staring at her. Was she to be believed?—so quiet, so collected, so lovely-looking! How were they to act? An indistinct idea of having her secured ran through Mr. Rice's mind. But he did not know how to set about it, or whether he would be justified in doing so.

"I will give you an outline of the circumstances," she proceeded. "He——"

"Madam," interrupted James Ailsa, "it—I beg your pardon—but it may be my duty to caution you not to incriminate yourself."

A proud smile of self-possession, one full of meaning, arose to her lips. "I wish to tell you," she answered.

"May it not be well to reserve it for the coroner's inquest?"

"No. I should be an ineligible witness for *him*, in any court of law."

"Why ineligible for him?" involuntarily inquired Mr. Rice.

"Either for or against him. My testimony would not be taken."

Her words to them were as riddles: and they waited in silence.

"He came down here to-night, and we quarrelled. No matter what the quarrel was about: it was such as we had never had before. He calmed down: apparently. I knew that the more smiling he was without, the more tempestuous he was within. I stood here. Here," she added, advancing to the mantelpiece, but still not looking at what lay beneath her, and placing her elbow on the shelf and her hand before her eyes, "I stood in this way. He was pouring out some wine he had asked for, and I watched his movements in the glass, through my fingers. I did not intentionally watch him: my thoughts were far away, and I suspected nothing. Suddenly I saw him slip something from a paper into one of the glasses; I felt sure I saw him; but I had my senses about me, and I took no notice whatever, only drew away and sat down in this chair. He handed me the glass, *the* glass, mind, saying the wisest plan would be to forget our dispute for to-night, for he must be going, and we could discuss the matter at issue another time. I took the glass from him, raised it to my lips, as if to drink, and then, as though by a sudden impulse, put it on the table without tasting it. 'If I am to drink this wine,' I said, 'I must eat a biscuit first. Reach them.'"

The lady paused for a moment, and her hearers waited with breathless interest.

"He knew where they were kept—in that closet," she added, pointing with her finger to a closet opposite the fireplace, and the two medical men glanced at it. "He opened the door and stepped inside, it is rather deep, and

came forth with the biscuits. But in that moment I had changed the glasses. I took a biscuit, began slowly to eat it, and he drank up his wine. In a few minutes he shrieked out convulsively. I sent for aid, ran out, and hid myself amidst the trees, for I was afraid of him. When my servant came back, we went in together, but I think the poison had then done its work. It must have been subtle and deadly."

Mr. Ailsa took up the empty glass, and with Mr. Rice examined the few drops left at the bottom. Not at first did they detect the nature of the poison; it was indeed rare and subtle, leaving, where it should be imbibed, but little trace after death.

"She says master's dead," sobbed John, as the gentlemen went out. "It can't be true."

"Too true, John," answered Mr. Rice.

"Sir, did he poison hisself, as she says? Did he do it on purpose?"

"No. He drank a glass of wine, and there was poison in it. He did not know it."

"Oh, my poor master!"

Full of excitement as Ebury had been—and had reason to be—on several previous occasions, it was nothing compared with what rose with the following morning. Mr. Castonel dead! Mr. Castonel poisoned! John ostentatiously closed all the windows of the house, and sat himself outside on the door-step, forgetting dignity in grief, to answer the mass of inquirers. It was Mr. Ailsa who carried the news to Mr. Chavasse.

"Is not this a confirmation of our fears?" exclaimed the latter.

"I fear it looks very like it."

"Oh, it is horrible!" groaned Mr. Chavasse. "Three young and happy girls to have been foully——"

"Nay, nay," interrupted James Ailsa. "Nothing is proved."

"And never will be now," replied poor Mr. Chavasse. "It is a mercy for the rector that he went beforehand."

Before the day was over, fresh news had gone to Ebury —that Mr. Chavasse meant not to pursue the investigation he had contemplated. Where was the use? he argued, since the guilty man—if he were guilty—was gone. Where indeed? echoed a few judicious friends. But Ebury in general considered itself very shabbily used, and has hardly got over the disappointment to this day.

An inquest, however, there was to be, over Mr., if not Mrs., Castonel, and Ebury's curiosity concentrated itself upon that event. Some gossip, told by the parish beadle, fanned the flame. When he had gone down to serve the two summonses at the Lodge, and required the name of the lady, she had replied "Castonel."

"Then it is a relative of his, after all!" quoth the village. "And we have been judging so harshly of her and of him!"

"I think I shall call and leave a card, when it's all over, and I am about again," said Mrs. Major Acre. "That is, if she stops here."

The "dummy drawer" was examined previously to the inquest, and found to contain exactly what Mr. Castonel had said, a phial of hartshorn, and some magnesia. "Which of course he was putting there," was Dame Vaughan's comment, "when little Tuck caught him on the steps." The drawer had evidently possessed a secret spring, which had been recently wrenched away and was gone.

The day appointed for the inquest dawned, and those who were connected with it, and those who were not, flocked up to the Hardwick Arms. The strange lady was called in her turn, and the coroner demanded her name.

"Lavinia Castonel. I presume my evidence will be dispensed with, when I state who I am. A wife cannot give evidence in matters that touch upon her husband."

The room stared. "A coroner's court is an exception!" called out a voice, which was drowned by the coroner's "Hush."

"Lavinia Castonel," said he. "Any relation to the late Mr. Castonel?"

"His wife."

A rising hum—a shock—almost a shriek. Squire Hardwick interrupted it, surprised out of his magisterial etiquette of silence in another's court.

"It is impossible you can be his wife. You are stating what is not true."

"Mr. Castonel's wife," she calmly repeated. "His widow now."

Great confusion arose, and the coroner was powerless at first to repress it. Possibly he had his curiosity like the rest. Everybody was asking questions: one rose high.

"Had she married him since the death of the last Mrs. Castonel?"

"No, she had not," she replied. "She had married him before he first came to Ebury."

Higher rose the confusion. "Then if she was his wife, what was the position of the unhappy young ladies to whom he had given his name?"

"The inquirers might settle that as they pleased," she carelessly answered. "It was no business of hers. *She* was his lawful wife."

Nothing more, touching this, could be got out of her. She would afford no further explanation, no confirmation of her assertion, or any details. But her calm, equable manner carried a conviction of its truth to half the court. The coroner took her evidence relating to the death of Mr. Castonel: it was exactly what she had told the two medical men, and the maid-servant, so far as she was able, confirmed it. That, at any rate, was truth. The jury believed it, and

their verdict was to the effect that Gervase Castonel had met his death at her hands, but that she was justified in what she had done, having acted in self-defence.

So that was the ending of Mr. Castonel and his doings in Ebury: and a very unsatisfactory ending it was, in every sense of the word. The lady and the maid left the place the day subsequent to the inquest, and that was the ending of them. Numerous tales and rumours went abroad, as rumours always do. One said the money to establish Mr. Castonel had been hers, not his, and that she dared not publicly avow herself to be a wife, or it would be lost to her. Another that he had forced her to submit to his apparent marriages under threats, for that he held some dreadful secret of hers in his power, and she feared to gainsay him. Another—— But why pursue these reports? No one could tell whence they originated, or whether they were true or false. The whole affair remains a miserable mystery to Ebury, and probably ever will do so, and its exasperated curiosity has never been able to ascertain whether the three ill-fated young ladies did, or did not, die an unnatural death.

Mr. Castonel was buried in the churchyard by their side, and it took the beadle and four subordinates an hour and a half to clear it of the mob afterwards. And Mr. Ailsa quietly dropped into his old practice, and took on Mr. Rice and Mr. Tuck and John, for he found there would be work for all. And to the latter's extreme discomposure, he found Mrs. Muff was to be taken on too, and would rule him as of old. And since Ebury subsided into tranquillity, it has become a matter of "good taste" there never to breathe the name of Gervase Castonel.

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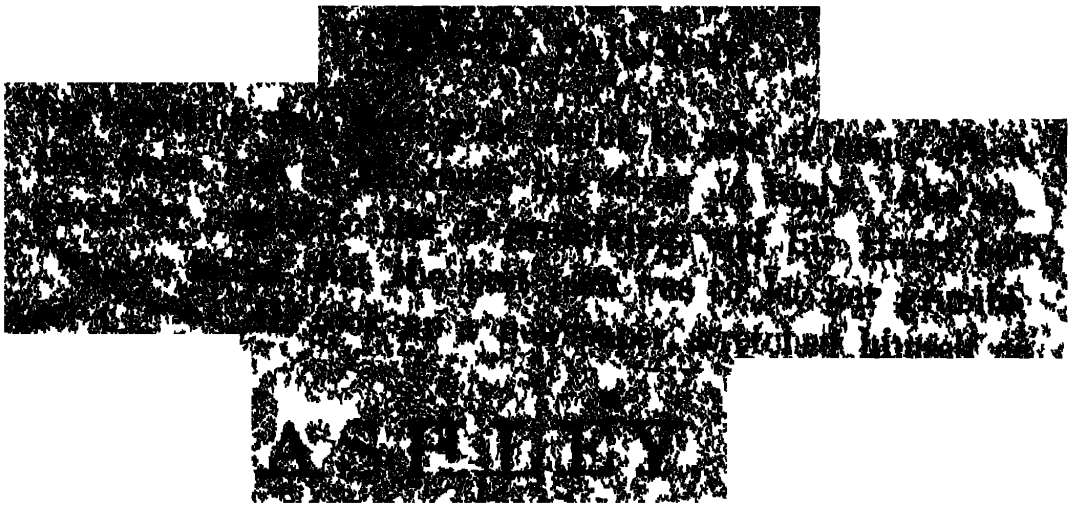


CHAPTER I.

LAURETTA CARNAGIE.

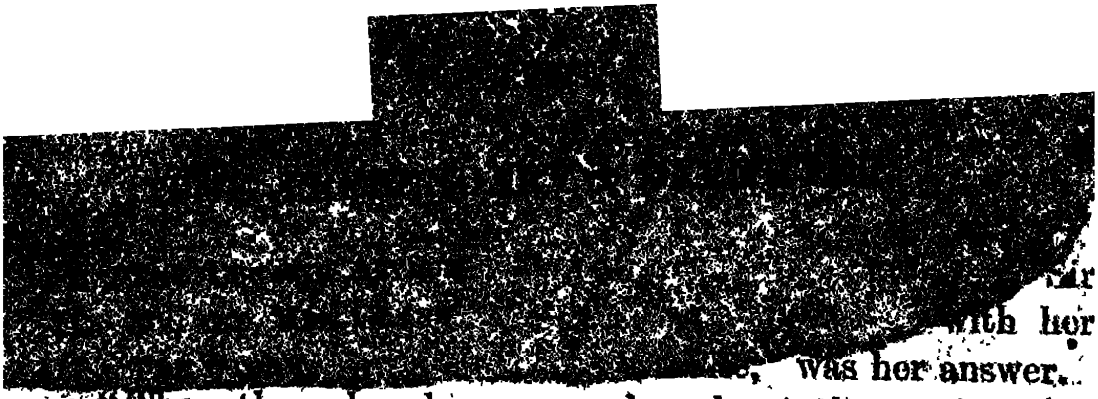
THE red light of the sun, nearing its setting, shone brilliantly on the fair domains of Ashley. The house, a fine mansion, stood on an eminence in its park, and commanded an extensive view of the near and distant scenery. Several of the windows opened to the lawn, and there leisurely stepped out of one of them a gentleman of middle age, followed by a young lady in the bloom of youth. He, Sir Henry Ashley, held a telescope in his hand, and, setting it to the right focus, turned it in the direction of the high road, which they could see winding along beneath them into the distance.

"Anna!" called out a peremptory voice from within the room, "you have not put on your sun-bonnet."

"I have my parasol, mamma."

"Come in and put on your sun-bonnet instantly. Your face will be a fright to be seen. The sun this month browns worse than at midsummer."

Lady Pope's mandates were not to be disobeyed, and Anna Rivers retreated to the house.



…ith her
…, was her answer.

"Then there has been some bungle at the station, and she has missed my carriage."

"There always is a bungle when things are left to servants," interposed Lady Pope's voice again. "You should have gone yourself, as I advised, Sir Harry."

"So I would, had I been sure of her coming. But I went yesterday, and I went the day before, and nothing came of it. I can't pass my days dancing between here and Stopton. She's staying, no doubt, at that old Indian's at Liverpool. They who were to receive her and start her off here."

"I wish she was not coming at all," cried Lady Pope. "The idea of a gay man—as you may be called—being left resident guardian to a girl of twenty! Steps must be taken to provide her with another home—and a never-ending trouble I foresee we shall have about it. You might have taken my advice and declined to receive her here at all. Under the circumstances you would have been justified, without any breach of politeness."

"It would have been more a breach of kindness," said Sir Harry, dryly. "As you happen to be with me, this house is as suitable for her, at present, as any other. But I cannot make out how it was the General never received the news of my wife's death."

"Very likely you forgot to write," observed Lady Pope. "Carelessness was always the besetting sin of Henry Ashley."

A conscious smile curled Sir Henry's lip. Carelessness

his besetting sin! then what might be said of many others that beset him? He made his sister no reply. She was given by nature to fits of grumbling, and Sir Harry had long ago found that the best plan was to let her grumble the fit out. He took up a newspaper, stretched himself on one of the benches, and read away at ease. Lady Pope raised her voice now and then, but Sir Harry took refuge in the journal, as an excuse for silence. Presently Anna Rivers, who had walked to the brow of the slope, came back again.

"The chaise is coming on quickly, Sir Harry. It is a chaise, and has taken the Ashley turning."

"Then she *has* missed the carriage!" protested Lady Pope. "Those two men will be sticking themselves with it at Stopton until the last train's in to-night: and that will be eleven o'clock. Getting tipsy, of course. Bad management, Sir Harry."

An interval of expectation, and the chaise spoken of rattled over the gravel drive of the lawn. A tall, distinguished-looking young man sprang from it before it had well stopped. Lady Pope wheeled her chair to the glass door, and put her head out, hoping to bring the arrival within view; her ears also at work, as they generally were.

"That's not Miss Carnagie! Why, I do believe it is—— Anna," she sharply called out, breaking off her sentence, "Anna, come here. That's never Arthur Ashley?"

"Yes, mamma."

"What brings him here now? He——"

"How are you, dear Lady Pope?" cried the stranger, coming up with Sir Harry, and holding out his hand.

"None the better for seeing you, Mr. Ashley," was the civil rejoinder. "Pray how is it that you come wasting your time here now, shirking your studies?"

"I went up for honours, dear aunt, and gained them. So

I can afford myself a holiday." At which satisfactory information, Lady Pope vouchsafed nothing but an unsatisfactory grunt.

The two gentlemen were speedily immersed in college politics, reminiscences to Sir Henry, realities to Arthur Ashley. Sir Henry had never gained university honours, had never tried for them, but he was delighted that Arthur, his presumptive heir, should do so. Sir Henry had been always childless, and this young man, his brother's eldest son, was the present heir to Ashley. Sir Henry had taken to him years ago, and brought him up as such.

A short period, and another arrival aroused them. They went out to meet it, Sir Harry hurriedly, Arthur Ashley and Miss Rivers lingeringly, for he seized the opportunity of speaking to her in a whisper. Sir Henry's carriage was drawn up before the entrance. A lady, dark as a gipsy, with flashing eyes and features of great beauty, sat in it, whilst a copper-coloured woman was awkwardly descending from the seat behind. Sir Harry soon had Miss Carnagie on his arm, and led her in.

She seemed to take in everything with those keen, flashing eyes; the extensive grounds, the indoor arrangements of the house; and now she was addressing Lady Pope. It struck some of them that she was more self-possessed in manner than is common to a girl of twenty.

"I hope I have the pleasure of meeting Lady Ashley in good health."

"This is my sister, Lady Pope," interrupted Sir Harry. "I wrote to General Carnagie of the loss I had experienced in my wife: the letter must have miscarried. Lady Pope and Miss Rivers will welcome you, dear Miss Carnagie, as warmly as Lady Ashley would have done."

"I am an invalid," broke in Lady Pope: "a chronic affection of the hip joint: and cannot walk without difficulty.

So I am chiefly confined, in the day, to this chair. Anna Rivers will be my substitute in showing you to your rooms."

At the foot of the stairs, when Anna Rivers was conducting Miss Carnagie towards them, they came upon young Ashley. "As no one has thought me worthy of an introduction to Miss Carnagie, I suppose I must introduce myself," he said. "Miss Carnagie, I am Arthur Ashley."

His voice was so pleasant, his manner so easy, himself altogether so much of a gentleman, that it would have been sufficient passport to her favour, even without his good looks, and Miss Carnagie thought so. But she hurried on. If ever there was a vain girl on earth, it was Lauretta Carnagie, and she had no wish to linger with strangers until the dust and the travelling attire were taken off her. She had a favourite theory—that first impressions were everything. Some trunks were in her room, and the copper-maid was seated on them; her head wrapped round with folds of pink merino, and her shoulders with a covering of white linen.

"You good-for-nothing, vicious creature!" broke out Miss Carnagie. "How dare you sit idling there, instead of putting out my things to dress?"

"How can Nana get out missie's things if missie got the keys?" responded the woman, her broad mouth breaking into a pleasant smile.

"She is the most idle thing alive," said Miss Carnagie to Anna, as she threw a ring of keys to the attendant. "Indian servants always are. If I were not to rate her continually, I should get nothing done. Papa was often obliged to have her flogged."

"Flogged!" uttered Anna, who had stood by, quite distressed at witnessing such discourtesy to a servant.

"And as you don't allow flogging in England, and she knows it, she has made up her mind to be as vicious and

troublesome as possible," proceeded Miss Carnagie. "My mother was the daughter of a West Indian planter, and Nana was a slave born on the estate, so she is our own property, just the same as our horses or dogs. They had her taught hair-dressing and millinery, that she might be a maid to me; and when mamma died, she specially bequeathed her to me."

"But Nana not idle, Nana not vicious; Nana love missie, and try, try, try alwars to please her with all her heart," interrupted the woman, whilst tears ran down her cheeks.

"Can I assist you in any way?" inquired Anna Rivers of Miss Carnagie. "If not, I will no longer intrude upon you."

"You don't intrude. I hate to be alone. Sit down whilst she does my hair. I want to know all about everything here. You are aware I am a stranger. Do you live here?"

"No. I am visiting here with mamma, Lady Pope."

"Was that really Sir Harry Ashley? I pictured him as old as my father: and he had white whiskers and a bald head. Your uncle is a young man. At least, we should call him so in India: men age so rapidly there."

"Sir Harry is more than forty: near fifty. I believe. But he is not my uncle."

"No! He introduced Lady Pope as his sister."

"But Lady Pope is not my mother. In point of fact, she is not related to me. My father, Captain Rivers, was a widower, and she—who was Miss Ashley then—married him. I was only two years old, and have never known any other mother. My father did not live long, and then she married an elderly man, Colonel Sir Ralph Pope."

"Is he here?"

"Oh! he is dead too: has been dead a long while."

"Who was that we met in the hall? 'Arthur Ashley,' he said. Some one also attached to the house?"

"Sir Harry's nephew. He lives here. He is the heir to Ashley. His father, Sir Harry's brother, was the heir, but he is recently dead."

"He will be Sir Arthur Ashley?"

"Of course. In time."

"Which dress missie wear?", inquired Nana, displaying two or three, all of them much alike: black silk with crape trimmings.

Miss Carnagie pointed to one. "It is so annoying to be in mourning!" she pettishly exclaimed. "One can never appear to advantage."

"I like black silk," remarked Anna. "It always looks well."

"For you, who are fair; but I look like a great black crow in it." And Anna Rivers laughed.

Not like a black crow, but like a handsome girl. Sir Harry thought so when she descended to the drawing-room, and so did Arthur Ashley. The latter was extremely fond of handsome girls, and ready to flirt with all he had the good fortune to meet.

It was no doubt very wrong of Lady Pope, but she was given to building castles in the air. She might have raised as many for herself as she pleased, but an inconvenience sometimes arose when she so favoured her friends. Several years older than her brother, she had exercised an influence over himself and his actions in early life, which she strove still to retain. She it was who had helped him to his wife, and now she had it in her head to help him to another—and that other Anna Rivers. Anna was so completely under her finger and thumb, that she felt sure if she could only see her my Lady Ashley, *she* should be the real ruler of her brother's house. A suspicion had certainly arisen in her mind that Anna cared rather too much for Arthur Ashley, but it gave her little concern. She held the young

lady in perfect subjection, and she entered on a course of snubbing towards the gentleman, which she hoped would not fail to drive him away from Ashley. Cold, cautious, and positive, Lady Pope rarely failed to carry out any scheme on which she had set her mind.

CHAPTER II.

HIGH TREASON.

THE time went on, and Lauretta Carnagie grew in favour with some of the inmates of Ashley. Not with all. Lady Pope took a dislike to her, and the same may be said of Anna Rivers. Miss Carnagie combated Lady Pope's wishes, she was indifferent to her complaints and ailments, she shocked her prejudices. It was next to open warfare between them; their tastes and pursuits were so completely antagonistic. Breakfast over, Lady Pope would call for her work-basket and begin her morning's employment. Sometimes it would be clothes for charity children, sometimes fancy-work. Miss Carnagie held both in equal contempt.

"If you would undertake some amusement of this nature, you would soon find pleasure in it," began Lady Pope to her one day. "Suppose you were to work a pair of slippers, for instance, for your friend at Liverpool, Nabob Call."

"Pleasure in anything so horrid! Thank you. I never learnt needlework, and hope I never shall. It is only fit for old maids and ugly women."

"As I cannot be included in either of those classes, I will not reply to your words," was Lady Pope's retort, smothering her ire.

"I did not say others never did any. I said it was only fit for that sort of people," was the careless apology of Miss Carnagie.

"If you were to amuse yourself with a little music this morning?"

"I never play when there's no one to play for."

"We have plenty of books. Anna, reach——"

"Don't trouble yourself. I don't care for reading."

"What do you care for, I wonder?" thought Lady Pope. "I fear, Miss Carnagie, this wet morning is rendering you very dull."

"Dreadfully so. I wish I had lain in bed."

"Lying late in bed is perificious to the health. Even I, with my lame leg, am out of bed every morning at seven. How did you contrive to amuse yourself in India?"

"Oh, I like an Indian life!" was the animated reply; "no one there reproaches you with being idle. I rode, and dressed, and flirted, and lay to be fanned, and——"

"*Flirted!*" interrupted Lady Pope. "Surely I did not hear aright?"

"What's the harm of flirting?"

"A young lady reared in European society would shrink from such an avowal."

"Why, it is what everybody does," returned Miss Carnagie. "Those who say they don't when they do are hypocrites, that's all. Old ones are more addicted to it than young. I saw you flirting the other evening, when that man dined here, Lord——what's his name? the new member."

Lady Pope turned green; she had never been so insulted in her life. "Miss Carnagie!" she uttered, in an awful tone. "Your remark upon *myself* I pass over with the contempt it deserves," she added, after a pause, during which no apology came from Miss Carnagie, "but I cannot allow such pernicious sentiments to be avowed in the hearing of Miss Rivers."

"They will do her no harm. Not half so much as

poking her chest over that humdrum chenille stitch. I should throw it in the fire, if any one forced me to do it. So would she, if she dared."

Anna Rivers looked up, a hot flush upon her face. She did *not* like the work, but she liked still less to fall under Lady Pope's displeasure.

"I declare it is clearing up!" called out Miss Carnagie, springing to the window before Lady Pope could find fitting words to retort. "Anna, get your habit on."

"I cannot permit Miss Rivers to go out now," said Lady Pope.

Miss Carnagie turned her back to Lady Pope. "Anna, I say, will you go with me or not? You heard Mr. Ashley say he would ride with us if the rain cleared up."

Anna shook her head and whispered, "I dare do nothing that mamma opposes."

"You ought to have been born a slave, like old Nana," scornfully exclaimed Miss Carnagie; "the blacks on grandpapa's estate are under no worse thraldom than you." And Lady Pope was tempted to wish that she had been born a slave-driver, if she might have applied the whip to the young lady's shoulders.

Was such a girl likely to find favour with the precise Lady Pope? She sat on, in deep indignation, scolding Anna, who was not in fault, and believing that Miss Carnagie had retired to her own room, to indulge her idle habit of lying down, or to browbeat Nana. All at once the clatter of horses' feet was heard on the gravel, Lady Pope raised her ear, touched her chair, and went whirling away to the window. Riding off, followed by a groom, was Miss Carnagie, in the company of Arthur Ashley.

Every nerve of propriety possessed by Lady Pope was tingling. Her chair reeled off to the fireplace, and the bell was rung violently. It was to summon her brother: but

Sir Harry had gone to the Sessions at Stopton. For two mortal hours my lady sat, feeding her indignation, and then the runagates entered. Only to increase it. For Miss Carnagie coolly said that they had had a delightful ride, and she should go again whenever she pleased. If Lady Pope forbid Anna Rivers to make one of the party, that the three might play propriety, she had nobody to thank but herself if they went without her.

"How in the world can you have been brought up?" demanded the astonished Lady Pope.

"Brought up!" echoed Miss Carnagie, who was determined not to "give in," "I was with mamma in England for seven years; from four years old till eleven; and then she took me back to Madras with a governess."

But if Miss Carnagie was in disgrace with Lady Pope, she found favour with her guardian. In her wilful ways, Sir Harry saw but charming grace; with her ready speech and her great beauty he was more than fascinated. Miss Carnagie certainly possessed the art of attracting men to her side: no doubt her manners to them were more courteous than those she exhibited to Lady Pope. She privately told Sir Harry that Lady Pope was an ugly old tyrant, and Sir Harry enjoyed the confidence. His attention to her was growing more pointed than is usual from guardian to ward, and visitors to Ashley whispered, among themselves, that the place would soon have a second mistress. If Lady Pope had only suspected that!

But it appeared that visitors were reckoning without their host. For Sir Harry's manner suddenly changed. He grew cool in his intercourse with Miss Carnagie, and, indeed, took to holding himself very much aloof altogether from home society, spending his time abroad, or in his own rooms. So much the more pleasing to Miss Carnagie. For Sir Harry Ashley she cared not; but a passion, strong and

ardent as her own nature, had taken root within her for his nephew and heir. From the first moment she saw Arthur Ashley, he had made a deep impression on her. More fascinating, both in looks and manner, than any man she had hitherto known, it scarcely needed the opportunities, which were undoubtedly afforded in abundance, for this impression to grow into love. She already indulged visions of the future, when he shou'd be her husband, hers only and for all time; when he should parade her to the world, his chosen and envied wife; she indulged in visions of her future sway as mistress of Ashley; for Lauretta Carnagie hankered after position, and possessed a love of money and social power. Her life in Madras had been one of pomp and luxury: but this same pomp and luxury had made considerable inroads on the fortune of General and Mrs. Carnagie, and when they died, the former but three months subsequent to the latter, it was found that their impoverished estate would afford but a few hundreds per annum for their daughter. Double its whole amount had hitherto been expended on her dress alone. So she sought Arthur Ashley's society, or he hers, or perhaps the seeking was mutual; at any rate, they were much together. Which was scarcely justifiable on Mr. Ashley's part, for an attachment, a real attachment, known to none, subsisted between himself and Anna Rivers. Almost from the first, Anna had detected the pleasure Miss Carnagie took in Mr. Ashley's society, and the bitter pains of jealousy were aroused in her heart. Had this wild Indian girl come to supplant her? It seemed like it. And Anna had no means of showing her resentment, save by absenting herself from Mr. Ashley's presence.

But it happened one warm summer evening that Anna met him in the shrubbery. He stopped and drew her arm within his, and greeted her familiarly and tenderly, as was his wont.

"Let me alone, Mr. Ashley," she angrily replied. "Your right to treat me so has passed."

"Not passed yet, Anna," he rejoined, retaining her arm; "not until an explanation has taken place between us. Tell me the reason of your recent coldness. Why is it you have lately shunned me?"

Anna Rivers was superior to coquetry; moreover, she loved Arthur Ashley too well to indulge in it; and she looked at him in surprise.

"My conduct has only been regulated by yours," she said. "Ask yourself what that has been."

"Anna, let us clear up this bugbear between us. I suspect where the offence lies—in my being so much with Miss Carnagie. If this has given you uneasiness, I sincerely beg your pardon. We have been together a great deal: I acknowledge it: but the fault has not been wholly mine."

"Mine, perhaps?" resentfully spoke Anna.

"Yes," he laughed, "for leaving me so much to myself; and also—if I may whisper it to you—Miss Carnagie's. She might have sought me less. Oh, Anna, you are a regular goose! These flighty damsels are worth their weight in gold to flirt with, but for anything else—excuse me. Why, I would not marry Lauretta Carnagie if the East India Company dowered her with all its possessions."

Now if the intelligent reader can imagine him—or herself in Miss Carnagie's shoes, they may perhaps picture what might be that young lady's sensations when she heard this candid avowal of Ashley's heir: and hear it she did, for she was on the other side of the shrubbery hedge. All her wild blood, inherited from her half-caste West Indian mother, rose to boiling-water heat; nay, more like to bubbles of liquid fire. Never had she suspected that there was aught but common friendship between him and Miss Rivers.

Forgetful of all maidenly reserve, casting aside all delicacy

of feeling, her veins tingling, her face glowing, and her splendid eyes flashing as with a tiger's fury, Lauretta Carnagie passed through an opening of the shrubbery, and stood before her rival and Mr. Ashley. Upon which Miss Rivers drew away from the latter, and stood proud and defiant, and the gentleman would have given all his pockets were worth, if some kind gust of wind, stronger than ordinary, had just then soared him aloft, and deposited him in any other spot of this wide earth. Serve you right, Mr. Arthur, for you have been unpardonably sweet upon that impulsive girl. Your conscience is telling you so: and it is of no use to mutter over the advice of the old song *now*, and register a vow to yourself that you will practically remember it, for evermore henceforth, if your good stars will only get you out of this one scrape—"It is well to be off with the old love before we are on with the new."

"You have been professing to love me; you have been professing to love *her*," was the address of Miss Carnagie, whilst her frame trembled with passion, and the glow on her cheeks was fading to the hue of the grave. "Which of those pretensions was false, which genuine?"

For perhaps the first time in his life, before a woman, Arthur Ashley quailed, and his tongue forgot its honeyed readiness. Enough to make him. She stood, hot and fiery as her own clime, on one side, bending towards him to devour his answer; whilst on the other, she whom he really loved and had chosen for his bride, was drawn up like a repellent piece of marble.

His senses partially came to him. He took Anna's hand. "Allow me to conduct you to the house," he said, "while I explain to Miss Carnagie. One moment," he deprecatingly added to the latter; "I will not keep you waiting longer."

Anna had no resource but to go, though she would have preferred to hear my gentleman "explain." "A sharp

breeze," he whispered to her. "It will be the sooner over. On my soul it is her fault, more than mine: her foolish vanity has brought it on herself. Still, Anna, I humbly beg you to forgive me."

She did not answer. She only snatched away her hand, and sailed on by his side in sullen silence. He saw her indoors, went back again, and Lauretta Carnagie met him.

"One word, Mr. Ashley," she vehemently uttered. "Do you love that girl, Anna Rivers?"

"Miss Rivers and I are old friends," he evasively answered.

"Tamper with me if you dare," she retorted. "I ask if Anna Rivers is anything to you?"

"What the deuce—let it come out—she can't shoot me," disjointly muttered Mr. Arthur. "It is probable that Anna Rivers may sometime be my wife," he said aloud, but in low tones. "Not yet; perhaps not for years to come. But, Lauretta——"

"If you had behaved to me *so* in my father's house, in our own country; talked to me as you have done, you, nearly a married man; I would have had you scourged by the slaves. Scourged, sir, till you should have borne the marks for life."

Every manly feeling within him was stung to the quick, and he coloured to the roots of his fair hair. "Do not let us quarrel, Lauretta," he said. "Nothing has happened that need interrupt our friendship. If you, or I, ever caught ourselves dreaming that a warmer tie might hereafter unite us, why I suppose we must forget it."

"There is one thing I will never forget," she hissed in his ear—"what you have said this evening. It was well done of you, Arthur Ashley, to speak insultingly of me to *her*. I will wear those words in my heart until I am avenged."

She stalked away towards the house in her wild anger,

and Mr. Ashley, breathing a blessing upon women in general and himself in particular, strode in another direction. "I'll go away for a day or two," thought he, "and give the thing time to blow over."

Revenge Miss Carnagie had spoken of, and revenge she meant to have; how, she did not see or know as yet. Perhaps it was nearer than she could have hoped. By way of a beginning, she went straight to Lady Pope in the drawing-room.

"Are you aware that there is a love-affair going on between Mr. Ashley and your daughter?" she said abruptly.

Lady Pope would have screamed but for compromising her dignity. For Mrs. Wainwright, a visitor at Ashley, stood at her chair-elbow and heard the bold assertion. She waved Miss Carnagie away.

"Did you know that there was a clandestine affair going on between them?" persisted Miss Carnagie, who was not one to be waved away by Lady Pope.

"Where can you have learnt all these shocking words?" demanded Lady Pope, at length. "'Clandestine affair!' Really, Miss Carnagie——"

"Did you know it, I ask?" she pertinaciously interrupted.

"Madam," was the stiff response of Lady Pope, "the word clandestine can never be coupled with my daughter's name. She would enter into no such engagement: I will answer for it. And I know not by what law of politeness you, a young stranger, come into my brother's house and thus presume to comment upon family matters." Saying which, Lady Pope, calling hastily for the help of her maid, ascended to her dressing-room.

"You have committed high treason," laughed Mrs. Wainwright. "It is suspected that Lady Pope's heart is set upon her daughter becoming Lady Ashley. Arthur

won't do for her, now that his hopes of succeeding to Ashley are fading."

Miss Carnagie raised her head quickly. "I thought Arthur was the heir to Ashley."

"Pooh, my dear! I would not give two pins for his chance now. Sir Harry is safe to marry again."

"And if he did—who would succeed?" breathlessly asked Miss Carnagie.

"Why, his own children, of course; his eldest son. Don't you understand these things? Arthur Ashley will be ready to cut the bride's throat, whoever she may be, for cutting out himself."

Miss Carnagie drew a long breath, and left Mrs. Wainwright without answer. She went to her own room, sent out Nana with an imperious gesture, who happened to be there, sat down, and closed her eyes *to think*. She was capable of earnest self-communing, possessing the faculty of concentration in an unusual degree. Rapid and vehement in all her ways, her decision was taken ere she had sat there many minutes. "It will keep *him* out of Ashley," she muttered as she rose: "to do that, I would sacrifice myself to—to—a worse sacrifice than this will be. Wealth and position will at least be mine. And better be an old man's darling than a young man's slave!" Away she went downstairs towards the dining-room.

"Is Sir Harry in there still?" she inquired of a servant, whom she met near the door. "Mr. Ashley is not with him?"

"Mr. Ashley has just rode off to Brooklands, miss. He thinks of stopping a day or two, and I am now going to put up his carpet-bag and send it after him. Sir Harry is alone."

Lauretta Carnagie opened the dining-room door softly, and closed it after her. It was nearly dusk then, and Sir Harry had left the table, and was sitting in his easy-chair near the large window. He rose up in surprise at sight of

Miss Carnagie, as she advanced close to him and took up her position against the window-frame. She looked at him, but did not at first speak. Was she considering his personal attractions? They were such as many a woman might have admired. It was true he was no longer to be called young, but not a shade of silver mixed with his glossy hair; not a wrinkle, as yet, defaced his broad forehead. Time had been considerate to Sir Henry Ashley. In that dim, uncertain light, he might have been taken for but a few years past thirty. Miss Carnagie spoke at last, dropping her eyes to the ground.

"I have been thinking how ungrateful I was, so positively to refuse—what you asked me. And I——"

"My dear child," he interrupted, "say no more. I ought not to have laid myself open to a certain refusal. The pain that inflicted brought me to my senses; and if I have since secluded myself, scarcely meeting you but at meals, it has not been from any resentful feeling towards you, but that I would get over the too warm interest I had felt for you."

Miss Carnagie did not answer: perhaps the purport of Sir Harry's speech was different from what she expected. He continued:

"My wife I married in early life. To say I loved her would be wrong; I never did. My sister wished the match between us; I mistook friendship for love, and fell into it. She was a good wife to me, and our life was calm: I can say no more for it. But when you came, Lauretta, when we had mixed together in habits of intimacy, when I had protected you as my ward, then, indeed, I found what it was to love. I gave way to it without consideration. I forgot that my years had passed their meridian, and that yours were yet in their dawn, and like a fool I hazarded my fate—and met with a refusal. I am speaking now more calmly, you see, than I could at the time."

"But," she resumed in a low tone, "I came this evening to tell you that—I—think I was mistaken as well as hasty."

A silence ensued. When Sir Harry broke it, his voice was hoarse with emotion.

"I am not sure that I understand—that I dare understand. Lauretta, that one repulsion cost me dear; I will not hazard another. Give me fully to understand what you really mean."

"Would you be pleased if I say I retract my refusal, and ask you to pardon it?"

"*Pleased!* Lauretta!"

"That if you will take me with my faults and my wilfulness, I am ready to say you may have me?"

"You are not deceiving me?" he murmured.

"I *never* deceive," she answered, with so passionate a touch of scorn in her tone, that one in the secret might know she was thinking of how she had been deceived by Arthur Ashley.

He flung his arms round her, and gave utterance to the deep love she had excited in his heart: all the stronger for its recent suppression. That a passion so powerful should have arisen in Sir Henry Ashley, with his nearly fifty years! But so it was.

"I trust I am guilty of no dishonour in thus winning you for myself—of no breach of the confidence imposed in me by your father" he said, in a musing manner, half to himself, half to her. "My position is one to which even he could not object, and the contrast in our years is, it seems to me, a consideration for you alone."

"For no one else," she answered.

"Lauretta! how we may deceive ourselves!" he went on. "Shall I tell you a notion that has recently possessed me?—that you and Arthur were becoming attached to each other. You were so much together. Poor fellow! this

will be a blow to his prospects. Had I foreseen Lady Ashley's premature death, I never would have adopted him, or encouraged the notion of his inheritance."

A curious expression passed over her face. But at this moment, after a sharp knocking, as with a stick, the door was flung open, and who should enter but Lady Pope, her crutch on one side of her, her maid on the other, the latter bearing a flaring candle. Setting that on the table, and her mistress on a chair, she retired from the room. Sir Harry came forward, his brow darkening: "To what accident was he to attribute Lady Pope's intrusion?"

Lady Pope did not tell him. We can. She was sitting with her dressing-room door open, partly for air, partly that she might see all the passing and repassing in the passages, when a servant came by with a packed carpet-bag, which she recognized as Arthur's, and she demanded where that was going to. To Brooklands, the man answered. Mr. Arthur was gone over there.

Up went her ladyship's curiosity. What was he gone there for, so suddenly? Did Sir Harry know? Where was Sir Harry?

Sir Harry was still in the dining-room. Miss Carnagie was with him.

Miss Carnagie! echoed Lady Pope. The servant must be mistaken.

Oh no. He had seen her go in with his own eyes, and close the door.

This was a climax for Lady Pope. Why, what possessed this girl, that she was turning the whole house topsy-turvy? Go and shut herself in with Sir Harry before he had left the dining-room! She would tell her, this moment, what she thought of such conduct. "Send my maid here instantly!" she exclaimed to the servant.

So the maid and the crutch and Lady Pope, and a candle

to guide her ladyship's steps, for the staircase lamps were not yet lighted, sailed into the dining-room, and Sir Harry inquired to what cause he was to attribute the intrusion.

"I came to ascertain to what cause may be attributed *hers*," was Lady Pope's sarcastic rejoinder. "Really, Sir Harry—and I am glad to have the opportunity of saying this to you in her presence—unless Miss Carnagie can conform to the usages of decent society, I would recommend you to resign your guardianship, and suffer her to depart."

"In what way has Miss Carnagie transgressed them?" demanded Sir Harry.

"In what way does she not? A most unpardonable transgression is her coming here, at this hour, in this room, and remaining in it with you."

"I shall not eat her," said Sir Harry.

"Sir Harry Ashley," resumed Lady Pope, in a crushing voice, "if you deem my visit here an *intrusion* to be noticed in words, by what name can you designate hers? You may be forgetful of forms and propriety—men generally are—but it is my place to see that they are observed by, and towards, Miss Carnagie. Miss Carnagie, you will oblige me by quitting this room with me. Sir Harry, call in my maid. I told her to wait outside."

"Miss Carnagie remains here with me," returned Sir Harry. "We will join you when tea is ready. You seem to overlook the fact that, as guardian and ward, we may have business to transact together."

"Not at unseasonable hours," persisted the exasperated Lady Pope. "If Miss Carnagie remains here, I shall. It is really quite—quite improper, Sir Harry. I'll thank you to order the chandelier lighted, if we are to stay. That candle hurts my eyes."

Sir Harry was provoked—as he could be, very much so, on occasions. "Lady Pope," he said, "you are assuming

rather too much. I, as Miss Carnagie's guardian, am a competent judge for her of what is proper. That I shall guard her from what is improper you may well believe, when I inform you that in her you see my future wife."

Had poor Lady Pope received a dose of chloroform she could not have been more completely overcome. Her mouth opened, her chin fell, down dropped her arms, and down went her crutch with a rattle. Sir Harry had drawn Miss Carnagie's arm within his, and they both stood facing her.

"The future wife—*yours?*" were the first words she gasped.

"My own dear future wife, Lady Ashley."

"Are you bereft of your senses, Henry Ashley, or am I?" she inquired. "If I am not, I would ask if you have reflected on the miserable consequences that this will entail? The cruelty, the injustice to Arthur Ashley?"

"Enough," peremptorily interrupted Sir Henry, as he flung open the door and summoned the maid, who stood very close to it, to take away her mistress. "Order tea," he said: "we will soon be with you."

Lady Pope meekly obeyed, and prepared to leave with the servant. Her spirit was completely stricken down, and lay (as may be said) in dust and ashes. But first of all she beckoned Sir Harry to her, and, drawing him down, whispered in his ear:

"Henry, my brother, one word—for your own sake. Is this inevitable?"

He nodded.

"Oh, think better of it! If it be possible, break it off. She is not a woman to make any husband happy. She will make *you* miserable."

"No more," he coldly said. But she held him still.

"Henry, do you hear me? *miserable.*"

"I hear," was the indifferent, almost contemptuous reply. "I will chance it."

The neighbourhood was electrified when it heard that Sir Harry Ashley was to marry his ward; not only electrified, but shocked. Sir Harry, for the last twelve or fifteen months, had been looked upon as a high prize in the matrimonial lottery, and every one was ready to devour Miss Carnagie alive. She came in for the usual share of abuse: some ventured to speak against her to Sir Harry. She was too young, and too wilful, and too poor, and too proud, and too——a great many other things; but Sir Harry was too much for them all, and held to his bargain.

The wedding took place in Liverpool in the month of October, Miss Carnagie being married from the house of her late father's friends there, Nabob and Mrs. Call. Anne Rivers was bridesmaid, and perhaps she was the only one, save the parties themselves, who rejoiced in the union. But she could not overcome the miserable jealousy Miss Carnagie had caused to her heart, or the general discomfort she had brought to Ashley.

Arthur Ashley was joked, rallied, and condoled with. It was certainly a grievous disappointment, but he behaved magnanimously, and would not show it. Sir Harry handed over to him the writings of Thorncliff, a small estate, worth a few hundreds a year, and promised something about a government appointment. "Don't thank me for Thorncliff," he said; "I'll listen to nothing in the shape of thanks. I feel as if I had injured you, and this is a sop in the pan. But cheer up, my boy; who knows? you may be Sir Arthur yet."

Arthur answered good-humouredly that the chances were against it. He knew they were. And he knew also—his conscience was telling it to him at that very moment—that the fading away of his inheritance had been partly brought about by his own folly—that he had himself to thank for having lost Ashley.

CHAPTER III.

RYLE THE SECOND."

NEW YEAR'S DAY, frosty, bright, and cold: just the day for a sharp walk on the hard country roads, giving a healthy glow to the blood and to the face, very agreeable in mid-winter. A gentleman, who was winding up a slight ascent in a picturesque part of England, appeared to find it so. He marched along with a hearty step, aided by a right good will and a stout stick. His face was browned, as by foreign travel; he was no longer young, and he stopped, almost incessantly, to note various points in the landscape with a curiosity which seemed to say the locality was strange to him.

Not entirely strange, but it was thirty years since he had witnessed it. Presently, as he came to two roads, he halted in indecision: and no wonder, for one of them had been made recently. "Can you tell me, sir," he inquired of another passenger, who now overtook him, "which of these two roads will take me to Ashley?"

"To the house or to the village?"

"The house. Sir Harry's."

"This one to the left. I am going there myself." He was a little, spare man, nearing forty, with a red, good-humoured face. An ample blue cloak covered his person nearly to the feet, which were clad in dress-boots, black and shining. As they walked on together, a carriage came

bowling along behind them. Its inmates appeared to be richly attired.

"That makes the fourth carriage which has passed me this afternoon," cried the bronzed stranger. "Are they bound for Ashley. do you know?"

"To be sure," returned the little man. "To-day is a grand day with Sir Harry Ashley. The christening of his son and heir."

"Why, what do you mean?" uttered the other. "I thought Sir Harry and his wife were childless."

"They were until—let me see—just three months ago. On the 1st of last October, I introduced their son into the world."

"You!" exclaimed the stranger, halting and gazing at his companion. "You cannot be Josiah Gay?"

"I am Josiah Gay's son. My father has been dead these twelve years. And I stand in his place, the village Æsculapius."

"Then you must be young Jos?"

"No, poor Jos is gone also. I am Ned. But you have the advantage of me."

"I suppose so. A residence in a hot climate plays old Harry with one's looks. And, otherwise, you would not remember me, for you were an urchin in pinafores when I left. Your brother might, were he alive. He and I and Harry Ashley—reckless Hal!—have had many a spree together: robbed more orchards and done more midnight damage than I should care to tell of now. To think of Hal Ashley, the third son, coming into the title before he saw six-and-twenty."

"Perhaps you are Philip Hayne? Mr. Hayne."

"Major Hayne, at your service," returned the other, raising his hat, and disclosing a head nearly bald. "Thirty years have I served the East India Company, and only got

my majority to retire upon. Well, well; we should be thankful for small mercies in this life; and I have neither chick nor child."

"Wish I could say the same," cried Mr. Gay, drawing his good-humoured face into a comical expression. "I count ten, and there may be ten more behind 'em, for aught I know."

"All of us to our tastes," returned the Major. "If I had half the number I should run away the first wet morning. Another carriage!—two! They are coming thick and threefold. By the way, though, what has Lady Ashley been about, to keep Sir Harry out of an heir twenty or thirty years, and then give him one at last?"

"Twenty or thirty years! Oh, I see; you are thinking of the late Lady Ashley. Sir Harry lost his first wife four or five years ago. This is his second."

"Whew!"

"Last autumn three years he married this one. She was a girl of twenty, his ward, too young for him. And he may thank luck, more than anything else, that he has an heir at all."

"Ah?"

"She is of wilful temper, violent to a degree. Three several times have there been hopes of a child, and the expectations have always been destroyed from some imprudent conduct on my lady's part. Once, it was through a fit of raging passion. When she ought to sit still, she will go galloping out on horseback, for a day at a stretch; and when told that exercise is necessary to her, she will not take it, but lounge on a sofa from week's end to week's end. However, the child is born."

"Whose nose does it put out of joint? Somebody's, of course."

"Have you forgotten Ryle Ashley? Sir Harry's next brother."

"Not I. I never forget anybody or anything: man, child, horse, dog."

"Ryle Ashley's gone: died the same year as poor Jos. His eldest son, Arthur, was then the heir. Sir Harry brought him up at Ashley to all the expectations."

"And this young shaver cuts him out! Very annoying to him, no doubt, but there are worse misfortunes at sea. Had I a score of boys, I would rather see them carve out their own fortunes than inherit one ready-made. What sort of a genus is Arthur? Has his wits about him?"

"Clever and keen as was Ryle, his father. And he had the brains of the family. Arthur Ashley will rise in the political world, if he minds what he is about. There is a talk of his going into the House for some close borough. He has been secretary to one of the ministers these three years."

"Better for him than waiting for Ashley. I should like to see him."

"He arrived here to-day at mid-day: I saw him as he passed through the village. He is come to stand to the new heir. Lady Pope is outrageous, I hear, that they have not asked her to be godmother. But she and Lady Ashley do not hit it off together. She has been but once at Ashley since Sir Henry's second marriage, and left in a rage at the end of the third day: some breeze between her and the new lady."

"Who is Lady Pope?"

"Sir Harry's sister. Formerly Bessy Ashley. A widow now."

"What! did she marry? Why, she was nearly an old maid when I left."

"She married twice. A Captain Rivers the first time, Sir Ralph Pope the second. Here we are! The house is

not changed. By the way, though, Major Hayne, how came you here on foot? Where from?"

"The railway station. Stopton. I hate your close flys and your omnibuses, and I have not learned idleness abroad —as too many do. I purpose going over the Continent on foot, when I have said How-d'ye-do to what old friends I can muster in England. Rather an unseasonable moment to break in upon Sir Henry: but he will not mind that if he is what plain Hal Ashley used to be."

Not a whit altered in heart and hospitality, only in years. He grasped Major Hayne's hands with a delight he did not attempt to hide; and when the latter put forth his travelling attire, as a plea for not attending the august ceremonies of the day, Sir Harry laughed at the idea of so frivolous an excuse. He linked his friend's arm within his, and proudly paraded him before his assembled guests in the saloon. "The old friend of my early years," he said to them; "the closest friend I ever could boast of. Lauretta," Sir Harry continued, as they halted before a young, dark, handsome lady, "this is Major Hayne, the companion of my youth."

"A fine woman," whispered the Major. "Who is she?"

Sir Harry smiled. "Your coming has turned my head," he replied; "it was an introduction all on one side. I should have said, my wife, Lady Ashley."

And now, the circuit of the room passed, the Major drew aside. Sir Harry went forward to receive other guests, and the stranger made good use of his eyes. It was his custom. He was regarding a gentleman who had just come in, and whose appearance particularly attracted his attention. A young, elegant-looking man, with a large proportion of intellect stamped on his well-shaped head and expansive brow. But as Major Hayne looked, he suddenly, in the fair complexion, the grey eye, and the handsome features, detected a resemblance to the Ashley family.

"Ryle's son! It must be! the disappointed heir! I'll go and speak to the lad."

He did so, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "Unless I am much mistaken, you are your father's son."

Arthur Ashley wheeled round. But there was a quaintness in the stranger's smile, an affectionate regard in his eye, which won his favour. Where could he have sprung from, this brown, travel-soiled man, with his unsuitable attire?

"I am the son of Ryle Ashley," Arthur said.

"And Ryle Ashley was a partner in my boyish scrapes. Not so entirely as your Uncle Hal: but we have had many a wild frolic together. I was ringleader, for Ryle was a year or two my junior. So he, poor fellow, is gone, I find, and I am left, well and hearty. Should it ever be your fate, Ryle, to try your luck under a smoking sun, adhere strictly to temperance and simplicity of living. That is the secret which has scared away ailments from me."

"I am not Ryle, sir; I am Arthur Ashley."

"Ay, yes. I knew it. But your face is what your father's was when I went away, and I dreamt I was talking to Ryle again."

"I think you must be Captain Hayne," said Arthur, who had been ransacking his memory.

"With another step in rank tacked on to it. The captain has subsided into major. But, as we are on the subject of rank, how do you bear the loss of yours?"

"I have lost none."

"The anticipation. You were Sir Harry's heir."

"Why, do you know," returned Arthur, becoming animated and speaking in a confidential tone, "I am glad of it now. With Ashley in prospective, there is too much fear that I should have frittered away my days; have led a life of indolence, as Sir Harry does. With the necessity for

exertion, came the exertion; and the love of it. I would not exchange my present life—and I can assure you it is no sinecure—for the renewed heirship of Ashley."

"You'll do—Ryle the second," cried Major Hayne.

The christening was over, and they sat around the banquet-table. A goodly group. Lady Ashley, in her young beauty, at its head, Sir Henry, with his fifty years, facing her. Nabob Call and Arthur Ashley, the child's godfathers, sat on Lady Ashley's either hand; the Nabob a surly old East Indian, peppery in temper as his favourite diet, capsicums and cayenne. It had been a marvel to the gossips that Arthur Ashley, a younger branch of the family, and a man without county influence, should have been fixed upon to stand to the child, when so many, far above him in position, would have been proud to render the service to their old friend Sir Henry Ashley. Lady Ashley chose the sponsors. How little did they think, who sat around her that day, and marked the ready smiles on her face, the courteous attention to her guests, the witty repartee which ever and anon rose to her lips—how little did they think, that hatred and revenge towards one of those sponsors was the ruling thought of her life! She had once loved Arthur Ashley, Sir Harry's presumptive heir, with all the passion of a warm and ill-regulated heart. Not from *love* did she hasten to become Sir Harry Ashley's wife, but that Arthur might be bowled out of the succession. Three years, and her hopes had come to naught—three years of feverish impatience: but now her revenge was gratified, *her* child was the heir to Ashley. And when Sir Harry had thanked her for naming his nephew (whom he had not thought of) as one of the heir's sponsors, she broke into a harsh, wild laugh: but she did not tell her husband that it was with the view of giving pain and mortification to Mr. Ashley that she had brought him to be

present at the christening of the child who was his supplanter.

With the dessert, the infant was brought in. The nurse made the circuit of the table with him. He lay in her arms, asleep, a bundle of embroidery, whose face might have been composed of lace and white ribbon, for all else that could be seen of it.

The gentlemen charged their glasses to the brim, and the company rose. "Long life to Carnagie Call, the heir to Ashley!" Not one drank it more heartily than he who stood at Lady Ashley's left hand, the supplanted inheritor. There lingered, in truth, no regret on his mind, and that revengeful lady little knew Arthur Ashley.

"*What* did they name the child?" whispered Major Hayne to his next-door neighbour, a lively young lady of thirty, when the applause was over.

"Carnagie Call."

"Carnagie Call! Is that English or Dutch?"

Lady Maria laughed. "Perhaps it is Hindustanee. She was a Miss Carnagie, of Madras, and Nabob Call has passed his life there. The child is named after them."

Somewhat later, the nurse was sitting before the nursery fire, undressing the infant, when the door softly opened and Lady Maria Kerrison came in. "How d'you do, Eliza?" she said. "I have come to see this prodigy of a child." It may be explained that the nurse had been children's-maid to Lady Maria's young half-sisters, and the Countess of Kerrison (Lord Kerrison's second wife) wishing to part with her, had strongly recommended her to Lady Ashley. The servant rose and placed a chair for Lady Maria, if she chose to sit down, but she stood looking at the child.

A miserable little infant, as brown as a berry, long, half-starved arms and legs, a scowl on its dark brow, and a whining cry that was rarely still. It was whining piteously now.

"Eliza!" uttered the young lady in the surprise of the moment, "what a frightful child! It is a perfect scarecrow."

"I call it quite an object," replied the nurse. "What with its lanky limbs and thin body, it looks all legs and wings."

"It is like its mother, though," said Lady Maria, attentively regarding the face.

"An ugly likeness, my lady. It will never have her good looks. But there's one thing it is like her in," added the servant, dropping her voice, as if fearful the walls should hear, "and that's in temper."

"Will it live, do you think, Eliza?"

"I should say not. Though sometimes these skeletons of children fill out and——"

Eliza ceased speaking, for who should sail into the room but Lady Ashley, Mrs. Call, and Lady Kerrison, the child's godmother.

"A beautiful infant!" rapturously cried Mrs. Call, who had a great aversion to children, and had never yet been able to distinguish one from another. "You ought to be proud of your charge, nurse?"

"I am, ma'am. It is a perfect love, as I often tell my lady. And got its mamma's eyes."

"Nana says I was like it when I was a child," broke in Lady Ashley to Mrs. Call. "Do you think I was?"

"Very much so," promptly replied Mrs. Call, not, however, having the slightest recollection on the subject.

The whole of this time the child was moaning its piteous moan, and the visitors turned to leave the room. Lady Kerrison lingered for a moment.

"Does it get enough to eat, Eliza? I never saw so thin a child."

"It eats enough for two, my lady."

"And the more it eats, the thinner it becomes," interposed Lady Maria. "Eliza says it's all bones and feathers."

"Bones and feathers!" echoed Lady Kerrison. "*Feathers!*"

"Oh, Lady Maria!" uttered the servant, "I never said so. I said all legs and wings."

"Legs and wings, that was it!" laughed Lady Maria. "I knew it was something that made me think of birds. Good night, Eliza. I wish you more luck with the young gentleman."

Arthur Ashley stood in the drawing-room, his cup of coffee in his hand, talking to Lady Maria Kerrison. His uncle came up and drew him apart.

"I have had no time to ask you anything, Arthur. You should have managed to get here before to-day."

"I could not. Lady Pope——"

"I know, I know," hastily interrupted Sir Harry, as if there were something in the subject he wished to avoid. "Has anything been decided about your marriage? Anna will be tired of waiting."

Arthur Ashley was about to answer, when he perceived that Lady Ashley was standing close to him on the other side, listening. "I have other things to think of," he shortly said, and moved forward to take Lady Maria Kerrison's cup.

But the following morning, when they were alone, he himself introduced the subject to his uncle. "I have been thinking—and Anna—that if all goes well till the end of summer, we shall try our luck together. What with one source and another, I make out seven or eight hundred a year, and it is of no use waiting. Anna is willing to risk it."

"Enough to begin upon," said Sir Harry; "more than I and my wife had, before Ashley unexpectedly dropped in.

But why could you not have told me of this last night, when I asked you about it?"

"One does not like to speak of such things in a crowded drawing-room," was Arthur Ashley's evasive reply. How could he tell his uncle that a feeling of delicacy towards *her*, who, he had reason to believe, had once passionately loved him, prevented his speaking of his own marriage in her presence—although she had long been the wife of another?

CHAPTER IV.

OLD HANNAH.

SIR Henry Ashley sat one morning alone. It was nearly mid-day, but his wife, adhering to the idle habits of her Eastern childhood, rarely rose until late. Four years had passed since the christening of the heir—and he was the heir still. A sickly, unhappy-looking little wight, as brown and thin as ever, but possessing a most precocious mind. As the clock struck twelve, Lady Ashley entered with her two children, Carnagie and his fair and lovely little sister, Blanche. The little ones were dressed to go out.

"This is quite a spring day, so warm for March," observed Lady Ashley. "I am going to send the children down to Linden, and let them dine there."

"Oh!" screamed out young Carnagie, "I like Linden. I can make as much noise as I like there."

"Make the most of it to-day, then, my boy," cried Sir Henry. "It will be about your last chance. They must take their farewell of Linden," he added to his wife; "I have received a letter from Arthur this morning."

"What have Arthur Ashley's letters to do with our children?" demanded Lady Ashley, in no pleasant tone.

"A great deal, so far as Linden goes. Arthur and his wife are coming to live at it themselves."

Lady Ashley's eyes flashed fire. "Coming to live at Linden!" she exclaimed. "And will you permit it?"

"I have no authority in the matter," returned Sir Harry Ashley. "Linden belongs to Arthur."

"I don't care who it belongs to," was the intemperate rejoinder of his lady. "Linden has always been ours, to use for the benefit of our children, and it shall remain so still."

Sir Harry began to whistle: rather a favourite amusement of his. He never would quarrel with his wife, and it was his great resource when she spoke in terms of provocation—as she frequently did.

"How dare Arthur Ashley interfere with our arrangements?" she began again.

"My dear, do be reasonable," urged Sir Harry: "you know the circumstances as well as I do. Linden was a pretty, unpretending little place in my father's time, as it is now, jutting upon the edge of the park, and when its proprietor offered it for sale, my father was too glad to buy it. Of course we all thought he intended it to go with the estate, but he left it to Lady Pope, who was not married then. I believe Sir Arthur made her give a sort of promise that it should not eventually be separated from Ashley. However, she has willed it to Arthur, and there's an end of it."

"Linden was ours," fiercely retorted Lady Ashley. "Who says it was your sister's?"

"Why, Lauretta, you knew it was hers! you must have heard so fifty times. I only rented it from her."

"I did not hear it, I did not know it. What have I to do with the details of the estate?"

"Well," coldly returned Sir Harry, "when Lady Pope died, last November, I informed you of the contents of her will upon my return from the funeral, and that Linden was bequeathed to Arthur. I am sure I thought you would be delighted to hear that Arthur and Mrs. Ashley were coming

to Linden. I went there this morning, after breakfast, to see about some alterations he wants made, and it was running in my head, all the way there and back, what an agreeable companion Anna would be for you. I cannot say, though, but that I am surprised at Arthur's fixing on Linden as a residence. In the first place, the house is small; in the second, I don't well see how he will get on with his parliamentary matters, so far away from town."

Lady Ashley did not immediately answer. This place, Linden, had been used by Sir Henry for many years as the dairy-farm, and Lady Ashley had been in the frequent habit of sending her two children with their attendants to the house for the whole day. She imagined that the change and the exercise were of benefit to Carnagie; and besides, the noise of children at home waged perpetual war with her nerves.

"If you do not stop Arthur Ashley's coming, you have no love for your own children," she resumed, in a voice of concentrated passion.

Her husband laughed. "Lauretta, don't be childish. Arthur has announced his determination to reside at Linden, and it is not possible for me to interfere, even by a hint. Our children will do as well without Linden as with it. And they can go there sometimes: Arthur's young ones will be rare playmates for them."

"My children shall never mix with Arthur Ashley's," she retorted, with a pale, determined lip.

"Never mix with Arthur Ashley's!" repeated Sir Henry, in astonishment. "What do you mean, Lauretta?"

"Never. For I hate him, and all who belong to him."

Sir Henry put on his hat, with a sigh, and went out: he saw she was going into one of her unmanageable humours. Poor Sir Harry Ashley! He had found his sister's temper, when she ruled at Ashley, inimical to his comfort, but he

had scarcely changed for the better in that respect when he made Lauretta Carnagie his wife.

Not until July did Mr. and Mrs. Ashley arrive at Linden. It took some months to put the place in order for them, and Arthur could not leave town sooner. He wrote M.P. to his name now, and was the right hand, under the rose, of Lord Swaytherealm, the greatest man in the Lower House. Sir Harry was there to welcome them, but not Lady Ashley. On the following Sunday afternoon, however, the two families met together, near the secluded cottage of Watson the gamekeeper. Watson's mother, an old woman of five-and-seventy, was sunning herself outside, on the bench, when Mr. and Mrs. Ashley and their eldest child came up. Mrs. Ashley, a very affable young woman, but just now in delicate health, sat down by her side, glad of the rest. Almost at the same moment, Sir Henry Ashley, his wife, and Master Carnagie also appeared in view.

"Do you remember me, Hannah?" inquired Mrs. Ashley.

Of course not, at first, for old Hannah was growing dim of sight, and had not seen her for several years.

"You remember me?" interposed Arthur.

"Remember you, Master Arthur!" reiterated old Hannah; "I must forget myself before I forget you."

"Well—this lady is thy wife. And you know I married Anna Rivers. She was a favourite of yours, in days gone by."

The old woman's face lighted up with intelligence, and when the bustle occasioned by the greeting of Sir Henry Ashley had subsided, she beckoned forward the little boy by Mrs. Ashley's side.

"What do they ca' ye, my bonny bairn?" she inquired.

He was a gentle child of three years, with the fair curls and bright Saxon features of the Ashley race. When he was made to comprehend the question—for though it was

fifty years since old Hannah came to Ashley, she had never entirely abandoned her Scotch tongue—he answered timidly:

"Ryle Ashley."

"Then tak' care o' yoursel', my bairn: tak' gude care o' him, Miss Anna," she added, looking at Mrs. Ashley, "for as sure as ye all stan' round me, he'll be one day Chief o' Ashley."

"You are mistaking the children," interrupted Lady Ashley, in a cold, proud tone, as she pushed forward Carnagie towards Hannah. "This is Sir Harry's son, the heir to Ashley."

"Nae, nae, my leddy," she answered, laying her hand with a fond, pitying gesture upon little Carnagie's straight black hair, "he's no born to be the inheritor of Ashley. Have ye nae heard the tradition, that there's only three names that can inherit Ashley? Arthur, Henry, and Ryle; each name in its ain proper turn, and nae to supersede the other: have ye nae heard it? Sir Harry kens well that it has always been so. Sir Harry, why did you nae name your son Ryle?"

Shades of anger, perplexity, and deep, deep paleness passed over Lady Ashley's dark face. Sir Harry had proposed that name for his son; urged it; but she in her strong self-will had insisted on calling the child Carnagie. "Ryle was the name of my favourite brother, Arthur's father," he had said. The more reason, had persisted Lady Ashley, for its not being given to *her* child.

Sir Harry laughed now, jokingly at old Hannah. "We have come to days of enlightenment, Hannah," he said, "and have done with ghosts and traditions. Sir Carnagie Ashley will do for the nineteenth century."

Hannah shook her head. "Ye ken weel, Sir Harry, that once, when ye were a random lad o' nineteen, ye fell into

an unlucky scrape. Nothing but money would get ye out of it, and that ye had nae got; and ye did nae dare to tell your father, Sir Arthur. I could nae help ye, but I told ye to keep a good heart, for that you would surely come some time to be the laird o' Ashley. I told ye that Henry came next to Arthur in the succession, and Ryle after that, and then it went back to Arthur again. You laughed at me; for ye had two brothers, older than you were, fine, healthy youths, and likely to live. But in a few years ye found that I had told ye truth. You should ha' named your boy Ryle."

"We will name the next so," was the baronet's good-humoured reply.

"Ye may never have another. But I think ye are mocking at me, Sir Harry, as ye did in your young days. What did I tell you, Mr. Arthur, amaist half a score year agone?" she continued, turning to Mr. Ashley. "It was the day ye sheltered in here from the thunderstorm, ye mind, when ye were wearing the mourning fresh for your father. Ye were saying ye would do this to the estate and ye would do that when it was yours. Do ye mind now what I said to ye?"

"To be sure!" cried Arthur, humouring the old lady. "You told me not to count upon Ashley, for that to succeed Sir Harry I should have been named Ryle, and that if no Ryle arose to succeed him, the title would lapse."

"I thought it would lapse," she went on. "When Mr. Ryle, your father, died in Sir Harry's lifetime, I thought nothing else but that it would lapse with Sir Harry. But now there's another Ryle arisen in your son. Is that why ye named him so, Mr. Arthur?"

"No!" almost fiercely interrupted Arthur. "I named him Ryle in remembrance of my father. I truly hope Sir Harry's own children may succeed him."

"My bairn," said the old woman, taking little Ryle's

hand in hers, who had stood quietly at her knee, looking into her wrinkled face with his clear blue eyes, "when ye are a great man and are called Sir Ryle, perhaps ye may have a little boy of your ain. Mind what I say to ye, *name him Arthur*, and dinna forget it. If ye are alive still, Miss Anna—and it is to be hoped ye will be for many a year after that—see that it is done."

"I think you are fanciful," said Mrs. Ashley to the old lady, in a good-natured but unbelieving tone, as if she would not combat too rudely her curious prejudices. "What difference can a name make in the succession to Ashley? The thing is not possible."

"We don't see why such things should be and such not, Miss Anna; there are matters beyond our ken. I could tell you stranger things that run in families than this, but I could nae tell ye why they run; no, nor their ain selves, nor their kith nor kin: and we may plan and we may talk, but they can nae be turned aside. Sir Harry kens, and Sir Arthur kenned it afore him, that none but those three names, each in its turn, have ever been the lairds o' Ashley—nae matter how improbable at one time their succession may have seemed."

"If you intend to remain here, Sir Harry, I shall take my leave," interposed Lady Ashley, in a suppressed tempest of passion.

They all walked away, Sir Harry and his nephew making merry over old Hannah's solemn belief in the infallibility of a name. To give an instant's serious thought to such "trash"—Sir Harry's expression—would have been injurious to the dignity of all the Ashleys. Yet what the old woman had stated was an incontrovertible fact—that since the creation of the baronetcy, two hundred years before, the holders of it had been Arthur, Henry, Ryle, Arthur, Henry, Ryle, in succession down to the present

date. The two children walked together on the grass. They presented a complete contrast: the one, lowering and sullen in countenance, dark as his own nature, the other, all smiles and good humour. Lady Ashley repeatedly called Carnagie, as if she would detach him from little Ryle, but Carnagie had inherited his mother's self-will and declined to listen.

"What are you going to do with yourself to-morrow?" demanded Sir Harry of his nephew.

"I intend to have a day's fishing. There used to be capital trout in the stream. Do you ever trouble them?"

"Not I. I see no fun in the sport. If——."

A sharp cry, as of pain, interrupted them, and they looked round for the children. Carnagie Ashley, whose ire had been raised by something which he could not himself explain, was beating Ryle unmercifully.

"Hallo!" cried Mr. Ashley. "Carnagie! What, beat a boy less than yourself!"

"Carnagie!" shouted Sir Harry; "have done, sir! Carnagie!"

It was of no use to call. Carnagie, in his fury, could not hear. The little child was screaming, as much from terror as from pain, for the blood was streaming from his nose on to his dress, but Carnagie still hit on. Mr. Ashley, who was up with them quicker than his uncle, seized Carnagie by the waist, and deposited him a few yards off, where he stamped and screamed. Sir Harry stormed at him, but Lady Ashley stood as immovable as a statue, looking at her son with intense satisfaction. Politeness kept Mr. and Mrs. Ashley from saying what they thought of Master Carnagie, and the parties separated for their different homes.

"Don't you allow that old creature a pension?" inquired Lady Ashley of her husband, as they walked towards Ashley. "Hannah Watson?"

"Yes."

"Then discontinue it."

"Out of my power, Lady Ashley. My father commenced it before his death, and left the charge to me. It is a sacred trust."

"She ought to be turned off the estate. How dared she insult us to our faces—saying that Carnagie would never succeed you?"

"For pity's sake don't let that trouble you," returned Sir Harry, laughing heartily. "Old Hannah was always full of her Scotch superstitions: she would make you believe in second sight, if you would listen to her. As worthy a woman, she, as ever lived, and was of quite a superior family, though she lowered herself by marrying my father's gamekeeper. *I* wish, *Lauretta*," he added more seriously, "you would go occasionally amongst the people on the estate: I think you might find it of advantage to you."

"The specimen I have met to-day has not been an inviting one," was the repellent reply of Lady Ashley.

CHAPTER V.

THE BUTTERFLY CHASE.

Mr. Ashley sat broiling himself upon the edge of the trout stream, and by his side, quiet as a mouse, sat little Ryle. Ere long, Sir Henry Ashley, holding Carnagie by the hand, came behind them. Ryle, who could not forget yesterday, shrank close to his father.

"What sport, Arthur?"

"Not any, yet. I had letters to write to-day, and did not come as soon as I thought of doing. There's a bite! hush! stop!"

There really was, the first bite. It was a poor little trout, not worth the landing, but Mr. Ashley secured him, almost with the delight of a schoolboy. It was nearly two years since he had enjoyed a day's fishing, and then not for trout. Carnagie and Ryle watched the process with interest. When Mr. Ashley threw his line into the water again, Sir Harry prepared to leave.

"I want to stay," said Master Carnagie.

"You cannot, Carnagie. I must take you home."

"Let him stay if you like," interposed Arthur. "I'll take care of him. Provided," he added, turning to young Carnagie, "he promises to sit still and does not quarrel."

"No, I believe I must take him," rejoined Sir Harry. "His mother will find fault with me if I do not."

He walked away, dragging by the hand the unwilling

boy, who kept his head turned round in the direction of the stream. When they came to the park, where the trees would shut out all view of it, Carnagie's feet became glued to the ground, and he sobbed out that he *would* go back to see the fish caught.

"The fish are ugly," said Sir Harry.

Carnagie's sobs increased to a roar; and Sir Harry, never famed for his resolution, yielded. "Well, run back," he said, "and sit down close to little Ryle. I will send Patience to fetch you presently. And hark ye, Carnagie—if you are troublesome to Mr. Ashley, or ill-natured to Ryle, I will never let you stay anywhere again."

Not waiting for a second permission, the boy darted straight back towards Mr. Ashley. Sir Harry watched him halfway across the plain, then turned, entered the park, and was lost to view. At the same moment, Carnagie was attracted by the sight of a butterfly, and, postponing the fish-catching, child-like, for this new attraction, he changed his course and went after it. It drew him away to the right, bearing rather towards the stream. A curve in the banks soon took him beyond view of Arthur Ashley, even supposing the latter had known he was there, and looked after him, which he did not.

It was a famous chase. Now the butterfly would descend with fluttering wings, and Carnagie, raising his hands, would deem it in his clasp. Once he thought it was his, and took off his hat to throw over it; but away it soared, high and far, as if attracted by the scent of the distant bean-field, which went stretching down to the stream, and away and away flew the child after it, drawing nearer and nearer toward the water.

Mr. Ashley sat on, at his sport, trying to hook the fish, his head running upon hooks of another sort, in the political world. Ryle began to show symptoms of weariness. His

legs had never been still so long before. "Here's some one coming," he said to his father.

It was a young woman, Carnagie's nurse. "If you please, sir," she said, advancing close to them, "where is Master Ashley?"

"Master Ashley!" returned Arthur, who did not know the girl. "Do you mean Master Carnagie Ashley?"

"Yes, sir. Sir Harry has just come home, and sent me here for him. He said he was fishing along with you, sir."

Arthur opened his eyes in wonder. "There is some error," he returned. "I think you must have misunderstood Sir Harry. He did not leave the child here."

"I am sure, sir, I did not misunderstand what Sir Harry said," was the reply of Patience. "My lady was not pleased, and Sir Harry said Master Ashley had made such a hullabaloo—as he called it—to stop and watch the fish caught, that he was forced to let him. And he ordered me to bring him home now, whether he cried or not."

"It is very extraordinary," exclaimed Mr. Ashley. "The child did want to remain, and I offered to take care of him, but Sir Harry said Lady Ashley would prefer his going home, and he took him away. Carnagie!" shouted Mr. Ashley, at the top of his voice, as he retreated from the bank and looked round. "Carnagie!"

No answer. The hum of the summer's afternoon, of the buzzing insects, of the gleeful birds, was in the air; but there was no other answer.

"You had better go back and inquire of Sir Harry where he left him," he said to the maid. "It was not here."

Accordingly she did so, making good speed, and Mr. Ashley resumed his seat and his rod. He was not in the least uneasy, and the matter faded from his mind, for he believed the mistake to be the servant's: that she had

misunderstood her master. But, ere long, Lady Ashley was seen flying towards him.

"What have you done with my child?" she panted, as she approached; and her eyes glared as he had never seen them glare but once, and that was several years before, in Ashley shrubbery, when she was Miss Carnagie.

Mr. Ashley rose, and raised his hat. He thought her strong emotion was but the effect of her exertion in running.

"I have sent the servant to the house to inquire of Sir Harry where he left him, Lady Ashley. It was not with me."

"It is false! False as you are, Arthur Ashley. Sir Harry did leave him with you. Give me my child! Where have you hidden him? Have you put him into the water!'

Before Mr. Ashley, surprised and confounded, could find words for reply, Sir Harry neared them. He was not so swift of foot as his wife. Patience also was advancing behind. "Arthur," called out Sir Harry, "where's Carnagie?"

"I have not seen him since you took him away. You remember you refused to leave him with me."

"I know I did. But he cried to come back, and I sent him. I watched him come."

"I assure you that he did not come," replied Mr. Ashley. "I have not stirred from this spot. Do you say you *watched* him come here?"

"I watched him halfway across the field. He was making fast for you, straight as an arrow."

Arthur looked terribly confounded. And the more so because Lady Ashley still glared steadfastly upon him, with her white teeth set, and her accusing expression.

The servant, Patience, had turned aside, but was again seen advancing now. Her face was pale as with affright, and she laboured for utterance. "Oh, sir! oh, my lady!" was her confused exclamation, before she had well reached

spoke, literally trembled from his agitated lips. "My friends," he said, standing bareheaded, "you have, most of you, known me from childhood, and can judge whether I am capable of committing so revolting a crime. Here"—he suddenly snatched at the hand of Ryle, and pulled him forward—"stands my own child: had the lives of the children been in my power, had I been compelled to sacrifice one of them, I swear to you that it should have been this one, rather than the other. Sir Harry," he added, clasping in his agitation the baronet's arm, "I never saw or heard your child from the moment you walked away with him: had I witnessed him in any danger, I would have saved his life at the expense of my own. Surely you believe me?"

"Yes, yes," groaned Sir Harry, wringing his nephew's hand. "I see how it is. I should have watched him into your charge. Something must have attracted the boy aside. It is my carelessness which has caused this."

"Oh, take heart, all of you! take heart, my lady!" said cheerful Surgeon Gay, who was sure to look on the best side of things: "you don't know yet that anything is really amiss with the boy. He may have strolled away. The hat's nothing," he continued, in answer to a man who raised it as if to confute his argument. "Last autumn, when my fourth boy's cap was discovered in Prout's Pond, and brought home, wet, to his mother, she wouldn't hear a word but that he was drowned, went into a succession of fits, and wanted me to put the shutters up. Two hour afterwards, the young Turk walked himself home, with his pinafore full of blackberries. He won't forget the tanning I gave him, though, if he lives to be a hundred."

The miller, James Heath, whose cottage was on the opposite shore, some way removed from it, was now seen crossing the foot-bridge. His face was whiter than usual

them, "Grimes's boy has just met me, and he says they think there's a child drowned, for a hat is floating on the water."

"Where? A hat—where?" demanded Mr. Ashley.

"Round there. Beyond the bend."

He rushed away, the rest following him. No one paid attention to little Ryle, so the servant picked him up in her arms, and ran after them.

Lower down the stream, much lower, they came upon a group of idlers who had collected there, labourers and others. One of them held on a stick a child's straw hat dripping with water, which he had just fished ashore. It was Carnagie Ashley's. There was nobody to be seen, they said, but it might be lower down—have gone down with the current.

"Is anything the matter?" demanded the voice of Surgeon Gay, hastening up to the people, whom he had discerned as he came along the by-path from the village.

"Matter enough," a countryman replied. "Sir Harry's heir was in the water. At least his hat was, and the boy was missing."

"I accuse him of the murder," impetuously broke forth Lady Ashley, pointing her finger at Arthur. "The child was left under his charge, and he pretends to know nothing of him. He put him into the water."

"Be quiet, be quiet, I entreat you," cried Sir Harry, in agitation. "You cannot know what you are saying."

"The child stood between him and the inheritance," persisted Lady Ashley, who was excited almost to madness, far beyond all control. "Only yesterday we caught him plotting with one who assured him his son should succeed to Ashley, and not Sir Harry's. It is he who has made away with the child."

Every vestige of colour—the bright colour of the Ashleys—had forsaken Mr. Ashley's cheeks, and the words, as he

which it had little need to be, for it was always under a layer of flour. He stepped into the midst of the group, taking off his hat when he saw the Ashleys.

"Whose child is it?" he inquired. "My wife witnessed the accident from her bedroom window."

Lady Ashley grasped his arm, the white dust from the man's clothes soiling her rich gauze dress. "Speak, speak!" was echoed around, and "Speak!" reiterated the passionate lady; "tell me who threw him in."

"The little fellow was coming across the plain, my wife said, running hard, and throwing his hat up, as if trying to catch something. She thinks it might be one of the summer cockchafers, or maybe a butterfly. She could not see him distinctly so far off, but she believed it was one of the young ones from the parsonage. He was spinning along with all his might, his hat raised for another throw, and he came, without knowing it, on to the edge of the water, and tumbled right in, head over heels."

"Why did she not save him—why did she not give the alarm?" uttered Mr. Ashley.

"Because she could not, sir, unfortunately, as Mr. Gay can tell you; she can't stir a peg."

Mr. Gay nodded. "She has not recovered the use of her limbs since her attack," he said, "and as they place her on a chair, so she must remain. I am on my way to see her now."

"She called and shouted," proceeded the miller, "till she was a'most hoarse, she says. But I was in my mill, and when that's a-going there's no chance of my hearing anything else, and the girl was gone to the village. So the house-door was shut, and, more than that, all the windows were. Whose child was it?"

"It was the young heir."

The miller started, and looked at his landlord. "Oh, Sir Harry! I did not know——"

What he would have said was interrupted by Lady Ashley. "Who pushed him in?" she uttered—"who threw him into the stream? Was it not *he*, Arthur Ashley?"

"*He!*" repeated the miller, his countenance expressing every degree of astonishment. "Lord love ye, my lady! Mr. Arthur ain't one to hurt a hair of a child's head. The poor little innocent was a-running about, in his sport, and fell in of his own accord. There was not a soul near him—more's the pity but what there had been."

The body was not found till late at night, by torchlight. Sir Harry and Mr. Ashley were both amongst the crowd on the bank, and it was the latter who received the unlucky child from the men. A momentary weakness overcame him. When it had passed, he turned to his uncle. "He was my little godson," he whispered. "I would give all I am worth to recall him to life. I would have given more than I am worth to save him."

But not so said the crowd. "It is a mercy for him that he is taken in his infancy," they murmured to each other, "before the responsibility of right and wrong can lie upon him. With his crafty disposition and violent passions, there's no telling what evil he might have done, had he lived; or what might not have been his end."

"And not less a mercy for the place," muttered Surgeon Gay to himself. "It would have fared but badly, had he lived to become Sir Carnagie Ashley."

CHAPTER VI.

ST. OUEST.

THE scenery around St. Ouest was charming, but the town was odious. Town indeed! it was nothing but a hamlet, with two hundred houses in it, and a gutter, a yard wide, running through the middle of its principal street, after the approved custom of French towns. St. Ouest lay in a remote valley, not far from the Eastern Pyrenees, which could be seen in the distance on a clear day, and to gain it from the high-road you had to encounter a remarkably steep descent and a sharp turn, safe enough for the surefooted mules of the villages, but less agreeable for the post-horses of travellers.

The hot day was over, one Thursday in August, and the inhabitants of St. Ouest sat outside their doors on either side the gutter, cooling themselves in the air and the scent before going to bed. The place could boast of a large and good inn, for the road above St. Ouest was one of traffic, and travellers were apt to turn off it to the village when they wanted rest, or to change their post-horses. The Hôtel du Lion d'Or stood at the entrance of the town, its host being the postmaster, as the sign over his large doors intimated: "Auguste Dusommerard, Maître de Poste aux Chevaux." Where Monsieur Auguste hid himself in the day-time nobody could tell; perhaps the cafés could; but the active, bustling conductor of the business was madame

his wife. She saw to the housekeeping, she saw to the cooking, she saw to the servants, she saw to the guests, she saw to the marketing, she saw to the post-horses, and she saw to everything. What would these lazy, incapable Frenchmen do without their active, clever wives?

Madame Dusommerard, like the rest of St. Ouest, sat on the bench in front of her hotel. She was a slim, active woman, with a clear complexion and quick dark eyes. Three of her maids sat on the same bench, but at its lower end, while the garçon Zan (as they had corrupted his name Jean) rested himself in the porte cochère, half sitting on the low post which leaned against its corner. Meanwhile the night drew on and the cafés began to empty themselves. Monsieur Dusommerard might then have been seen sauntering towards home in his shirt-sleeves, and wiping his brow with one of the wristbands, for it was always hot in the cafés, especially the Café du Soleil, which he patronized.

"Madame! madame!" suddenly screamed forth one of the maids on the bench, "we are going to have travellers to-night. I hear the sound."

"Bah!" responded madame. "Who is likely to come so late as this? Your ears are too fine, Célestine."

Célestine had a remarkably quick ear, and sometimes presumed upon it, but she knew she was right now. "They have turned off the road, and are coming down," she said. "Two carriages there must be, for I hear a double set of horses—three or four to each carriage."

Madame bent her ear. "It is so," she exclaimed "Look alive, my girls. Zan, get out of the porte cochère."

"Ste. Marie!" was Mr. Zan's reply, as he stoutly kept his place on the post; "what's the matter with them, that they are advancing at such a mad rate?"

Madame rose, and stood in consternation; the frightened women-servants did the same; whilst Zan abandoned his

post, ran a few steps to the left, turned up by the side of the house, and gained the vineyard, whence he had a view of the descent and was out of harm's way. Never had they yet heard horses come down that hill at a more fearful pace.

Zan folded his arms and did nothing: an Englishman would have rushed forward, at the risk of danger to himself, in the hope of averting it for the travellers. Not so Zan: he only looked on, and waited for consequences. Two carriages were descending the hill, the postilions of the first, who had lost all command of their horses, were shouting and screaming as only Frenchmen can scream. On, on tore the cattle: safely till they came to the sharp turning near to the Lion d'Or; but then——horses, carriage, and men were down, a frightful, frightened mass.

Zan condescended to advance then: mine host was soon with him, and half St. Ouest at mine host's heels. The postilions were drawn out first: one of them, though bruised and battered, shook himself and staggered back to afford what help he could: the other was dead. The horses were next secured from doing further mischief, and then the carriage could be got at. It contained a gentleman and lady. The former, who was getting in years, had his head and face covered with blood, cut by the glass. They brought him out, M. Auguste and another supporting him. He did not seem much injured, but confused and partially stunned.

"For the love of Heaven!" he said, "get a doctor. A doctor. Does anybody understand me? Does anybody speak English?"

"Oui, oui, monsieur," answered the landlady, "I do comprend—I spake the Angleesh. Zan, vite! cherchez Monsieur le Médecin. You no be afraid, monsieur; you no too much bleesé. Docteur soon ici." Madame had entertained many English travellers in her time, and had picked up her stock of English from them.

"Oh, I am all right," he answered, almost contemptuously. "It is the lady."

They were removing her from the carriage, totally insensible. A lady under thirty, dark in complexion, but very handsome. The ready wit of the landlady suggested a mattress, and one was brought in no time. They laid her on it, and carried her to the hotel.

"Are we to stop here for ever?" screamed a female voice, in native French, from the other carriage, which had been brought to a standstill, and the horses' heads turned against the bank, while the postboys had gone on to the scene of accident. "Just come and open this door, some of you gaping mob: I can't do it from the inside. Do you think we don't want to reach miladi and see what damage is done?"

The door was speedily opened, and, scolding and talking, the damsel descended from it. She was a French lady's maid. Behind her came also a coloured woman, holding in her arms a rosy sleeping child of four years, fair as alabaster, with long flaxen curls.

"Est-elle blessée? est-elle tuée?" demanded Mademoiselle Barbarie, as she approached her master, too much flurried to be ceremonious.

"I don't know what she is," he replied: and, it may be observed that, though he had never brought his tongue to utter half a word in French, he could partially make it out when spoken by others. "Ask if the doctor will be long, Barbarie; if he lives far off."

The doctor lived in the centre of the village, next door to the chemist's shop, and right over the savoury gutter, which was there at its widest. A long and eager queue (madame so phrased it) had flown to fetch him, and in a few minutes he was in the lady's chamber.

Little intermission had he in his visits there for the next

thirty hours; indeed, he scarcely left it. The accident had not seriously injured her, unless—here was the danger—after-consequences should ensue. The whole house, doctor included, addressed the travellers as milor and miladi. They were of the English nation, and rich, and that was quite sufficient.

"Milor" on the Friday was tolerably well, with the exception of the diachylon plaster on his head and face. He saw no reason why he should not have some dinner, so he ordered it, and walked about the sitting-room (which contained his bed in one corner), considerably chafed and restive until it should be ready. He had never felt so "bored" in his life. Unable to show himself in the street, for he was conscious that with those plasters he looked very like a Guy Fawkes: not choosing to appear even in the "salle," with its everlasting eating-table, never unlaid, and the staring Zan; excluded from his wife's chamber, and confined to this narrow one of his own, with its sanded floor, he thought the day never would pass. He asked for some books: they brought him four, all French, and useless to him: he asked for his sweet little daughter, Blanche, but she had been taken out for a walk: he had recourse to the window, but nothing was to be seen but a closed-up house opposite, and the fag-end of the gutter. "Purgatory" (a word he had just made out in the French books) "could not be worse than this!" ejaculated milor.

It struck four, and Célestine and the landlady came in to lay the cloth for his dinner. He could have embraced them both. At the same moment, a sound arose from the street, as of solemn chanting, and madame and Célestine sped to the window. Milor peeped also from behind the calico curtain.

"What's going on?" he asked.

It was a Roman Catholic funeral, winding along towards

the cemetery. A number of persons followed it, chiefly of the poorer class.

"Pauvre Etienne!" cried the landlady, her ready tears falling. "To think that this time yesterday he was as well as we are."

"Why, you never mean to say that whoever is in that coffin was alive last night?" exclaimed the Englishman, catching the sense of her words.

"It is the custom with us to bury them the day after death," explained madame. "This is a hot climate, milor. And indeed, the same day, if they die early in the morning, and we can get the preparations ready."

"Sharp work. I should think some get interred alive. I suppose those little boys, walking nearest, are sons of the dead. What did he die of?"

The landlady uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "But is it possible that milor does not know that it is the funeral of the poor postilion who drove him last night?"

He felt greatly shocked, almost to tremor, and sat down on a chair. He had known the poor fellow was killed, but thus to see his body borne past to the grave brought the horror more palpably home to him.

"It is just as if it was to be Etienne Baux, and none but he!" exclaimed the landlady. "When I ordered post-horses out for that travelling-carriage yesterday morning, I ordered lame Jaco out with them; then I found that lame Jaco was down with the fever, and had never come at all that day to his work. So I called out that Louis the paresseux should go. With that, up comes poor Etienne and said he would go, if I pleased, for that Louis the paresseux wanted to wait and drive the mail, to see his brother, who was dying in the next town.—That nasty fever, milor, has played real work with us this year, all throughout the department.—So poor Etienne went with the horses,

stopped there for the day, and was driving them back in your carriage at night. Ah me!"

"Does he leave many children?" was the grave inquiry.

"A whole troop of them. Five or six — is it not, Célestine? And another on the road, more's the pity!"

The procession had wound itself out of sight, up the hill, and madame and Célestine whisked out of the room again. It was the former who brought in the soup.

What did milor think? The doctor had been in miladi's room since one o'clock, eating nothing, suppose she asked him down to take a plate of soup?

"Yes, of course," was the ready answer. "Not soup" — with a rueful glance at the watery contents of the tureen — "something better; meat and wine."

The doctor came; and swallowed down the contents of a soup-plate, standing. It was *bonne*, *excellente*, he said, better than meat, which he had no time for, and as to wine —no, no. He had need that day of a steady hand and cool head. All was going on well, he added, but it had been a critical accident for miladi. And ever since she came to her senses she had given way to such excitement; was so anxious that the child should be a boy, that it should be born alive.

"We have no heir," explained the Englishman, through the landlady. "A girl cannot inherit." The surgeon shrugged his shoulders. Living under the equalized codes of France, our laws of heirship were about as easy for him to understand as those of the ancient Medes and Persians.

By the help of some good claret, of which he was compelled to drink sparingly lest his head should inflame, the forlorn guest got through the rest of the day. On the following one he determined to go out, plasters or no plasters. Another day of *ennui*, like the preceding one, would "do him up." All was sufficiently well in his wife's

chamber, and when the black nurse dressed little Blanche that morning, she told her she had a new brother. So by dint of pulling his hat low on his brow, and tying a black silk handkerchief up the sides of his face, he partially hid the damages, and sallied out.

His first steps were naturally directed to the scene of the accident, and here, as he strolled slowly up the hill, after contemplating it, he found that the upset had shaken him more than he thought, for he felt fatigued and dizzy, and down he sat on the roadside bank. Closing his eyes, he only opened them at the sound of footsteps.

A traveller was descending the hill, a sunburnt man about his own age, who held a stout stick in one hand and his straw hat in the other, whilst a small valise was swung round his shoulders. He was about to pass the invalid, when the latter rose up in haste.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "it must be Major Hayne! It is you, Philip."

"And who the deuce--why, bless my heart and mind, if I don't believe it is Henry Ashley! Is it you, or your spirit?"

"It was pretty near being my spirit, the day before yesterday," was Sir Henry Ashley's reply, as he grasped the traveller's hand. "How singular that we should meet here!"

"Singular! I do not believe it is real. I was dreaming of you last night, and have been thinking of you to-day, half resolving that my next move should be to England, to pay you a visit at Ashley. And here, as I descend this hill, hundreds of miles away from it, and wonder what the old beggar I see on its side has been up to with his face and head, he turns out to be Hal Ashley! What have you been doing to yourself?"

"If I were not a family man, I should make a vow never

to travel again but as you do --on foot," replied Sir Henry. "As we were coming down this hill, on Thursday evening, my carriage overturned—there, a little below; and the final results are still uncertain."

"An awkward bit of road," remarked the Major, scanning it with his keen eye.

"Awkward! I never saw such a nasty hill. I wish I had those whose place it is to alter it under my magisterial thumb at Ashley. It is a disgrace to any civilized land; but they are not civilized in this wretched France. One of the postboys was killed, the other injured, you see the figure I cut, and my wife has been driven into premature illness."

"How long have you been abroad?" inquired Major Hayne, as he sat down on the bank. "I was not aware you had left England."

"Twelve months. We went to Paris first, and since then have been about, I can hardly tell you where. Right royally glad was I to turn towards Old England again. We intended being back there for Lady Ashley's confinement."

"You don't like the Continent?"

"I hate and despise it. I should never have consented to come, but that Lady Ashley's state required change. We lost our eldest child in a most unfortunate manner—the little fellow whose christening we were celebrating the day you came to Ashley, some years ago. It was a lamentable accident, and arose partly through my carelessness. Lady Ashley went nearly out of her mind: indeed, I do think that for a time she was positively insane, and the medical men ordered a complete change of scene. So we came abroad."

"Has it been of service to her?"

"Oh yes; she had grown quite well. And now this appalling accident! And for it to have occurred in this

wretched village, which, so far as I can see, has neither comforts nor conveniences! Nothing to be bought for money. I believe they have been obliged to dress the infant in Blanche's things. And, to make it more inconvenient altogether, I caught my man-servant out, a fortnight ago, in such barefaced pilfering, that I discharged him, and determined not to get another, as we were returning home. Those foreign servants are all rogues."

"Who is Blanche?" demanded Major Hayne.

"My little girl. Suppose we go and see her," he added, rising. "The loveliest child, Philip!"

"Got the Ashley curls?"

"Ay. The poor boy was like his mother, but Blanche is an Ashley all over."

Major Hayne gave Sir Harry his arm, and they proceeded to the inn. The landlady met them at the entrance.

Had milor been to register the infant at the *mairie*?

Not he. "Milor" knew nothing about the registering or the *mairie*. What did she mean?

Then he must go to the *mairie* without delay. A child born in France was compelled to be registered at the *mairie* within a few hours of its birth, and Monsieur le Commissaire had just looked in to say it must be adhered to in this instance, although the infant was a foreigner and a heretic: otherwise they should all be brought up before the court to answer for their negligence. Milor must go at once.

"How can I go amongst the people this object?" uttered Sir Harry.

Oh, that was nothing, madame answered. Everybody knew of the accident, and would only sympathize with the patches of plaster. Her husband was waiting to accompany milor, in the capacity of witness, and had his best coat on, in readiness.

So Sir Harry, growling, went with Major Hayne and the

landlord to the *mairie*. The officiating Frenchman, whose face could not be seen for hair, sat, pen in hand, ready to inscribe the child. "Quel nom?" he demanded.

"He asks what name," interpreted Major Hayne, who had picked up a sort of language in his travels which did for French. "What is it to be?"

"Name!" uttered the discomfited Sir [illegible] Ashley likes to fix on the children's names [illegible] is too ill to be spoken to. It cannot be necessary to name it now."

"Quite indispensable, he says," cried Major [illegible] after a parley. "Impossible to register [illegible] Just hark how he jabbers at us."

"What absurdities are the laws of France [illegible]" Sir Harry, wrathfully. "Unreasonable, [illegible] infant but a few hours old! Why don't they [illegible] naming a child before it is born?"

"The name is not of much consequence [illegible]" Major. "Give him your own."

"No. Lady Ashley said, one day, she [illegible]"

"Give him mine, then. Philip."

"That's as good as any other, in the [illegible]" Sir Harry. "Tell him 'Philip.' Stay- [illegible] Ryle.'"

Another colloquy ensued, puzzling to [illegible] Harry flew into a rage at the French [illegible] spelling English names, and at length Major [illegible] them down in large letters, and the ma[illegible] the register. "Philip Ryle, fils de He[illegible] et de Lauretta Carnegie."

CHAPTER VII.

"HE AND WILL BE KIND TO HIM."

[illegible] never come alone, so the old saying runs. [illegible] was liable to be visited, towards the fall of the [illegible], by a low fever, half agueish, half typhoid. Had our [illegible] of health gone there, they might probably [illegible] its cause to that sanitary gutter, which, with [illegible], equally sweet, ended in a pool of stagnant [illegible] malaria. The inhabitants thought nothing of [illegible] the fever they had been bred up in their [illegible] it is well known that a person going fresh [illegible] locality where a disease reigns is particularly liable [illegible] by it, and this may have been the case with [illegible] Ashley. Certain it is, that, before he had been [illegible] St. Ouest, he was down with the fever.

It was a struggle between life and death. And when the positive danger from the disease was over, there appeared to the nurse as much danger from the state of weakness to which he was reduced. It may not have been the reader's fortune to witness, personally, the effects of this fever, common to many a French town. It has been mine: and I can truly say that there is no weakness, no prostration, worse than that entailed by this disorder.

What Sir Harry would have done without Major Hayne, it is impossible to say. Probably have died. The Major

was his constant and patient nurse, his cheering companion. He watched the moment for administering his strengthening medicines and nourishment, he was ever at hand with a cheerful word to rally his drooping spirits. Sir Harry feebly expressed his regret that the Major should be subjected to so wearisome a task, urging him to leave him to his fate, and to seek relief in continuing his travels. Wearisome! the Major replied: he should never care, so far as he himself was concerned, to be jollier than he was now. He had been long without a reminder of old times in India, and this was one: he had brought many a chum, there, through worse illness than this! All sorts of expedients the Major resorted to to amuse the invalid. Blanche was repeatedly called into requisition, for he thought that if anything could arouse Sir Harry from his dreamy state of weakness, it must be the sight of his children. The Major condescended to turn nurse, and would hold the infant, Blanche's new brother, on his knee, and exhibit its swarthy face to Sir Harry. The fact was, Major Hayne began to fear that unless Sir Harry would make an effort of his own accord to rally, they should be obliged to leave him in the cemetery of St. Ouest. The Major was afraid of touching the baby at first, but he got used to it. It was curiously small, and bore a striking resemblance to its mother in its very dark complexion, piercing black eyes, which already had her keen expression, and promises of jet-black hair. When it grew to be five or six weeks old, the Major would pretend to play at bo-peep with it. Anything to excite a languid look or smile from the invalid.

The medical men—for in addition to the village doctor one had been called in from a distant town—at length pronounced that Sir Harry's best chance of recovery would be change of air. Sir Harry had thought so from the first, for the very place, he declared, was pestilential, and "the

smells stifled him." Major Hayne eagerly seized on the notion, and undertook to consult with Lady Ashley.

That lady had not left her chamber, though the child was then two months old, and consequently had not seen her husband during his illness. "An unfeeling shame," muttered the Major to himself: "the woman is as capable of coming down a few stairs and across a corridor as I am; and if not, she might wrap herself up and be carried down. It's all Indian laziness."

The Major was not far wrong. However, he entered Lady Ashley's chamber and told her why it was necessary that they should depart. Would she go?

Lady Ashley quite laughed at him. She might be well enough to think of it by about Christmas, not before.

"In the half of that time, ma'am, in the quarter of that time, we should have to put your husband underground, if he stopped here."

"It is of no use talking, Major; it annoys me. I shall not think of stirring from here until I feel I am sufficiently strong to bear the journey without fatigue."

The Major was sorely tempted to an explosion, but he coughed it down. A bright idea seized him. "As it may be essential to keep your husband alive, as well as yourself, what do you say to our going forward at once?" he asked; "you can follow at your leisure."

"Thank you," resentfully uttered Lady Ashley. "A generous proposition that, to leave me alone in this horrid place."

"You seem fond of it," retorted the Major. "However, Lady Ashley, as it is a matter of life and death to Sir Harry, and his going or staying cannot seriously affect you, I shall take upon myself to act, and remove him."

The Major was a resolute man. When once he deemed

that he ought to do a thing, he did it, in spite of obstacles. Perhaps Lady Ashley found this out, for she afterwards acquiesced, with an ill grace, in the necessity for her husband's departure. It was arranged that Blanche should also leave. Sir Henry was anxious to convey the child beyond reach of that horrible fever; not that it was generally deemed infectious, but a sojourner at St. Ouest was never safe, and he desired to leave as little care behind for his wife as possible. No sooner decided than done. Major Hayne made a bargain for a second-hand nondescript sort of carriage, containing two compartments. In the coupé-front of this went Blanche and Mam'selle Barbaric; in the larger intérieur one of the seats was removed and a mattress laid down for the invalid, while the Major sat on the other. And thus they progressed by easy stages, very easy ones indeed, towards Paris.

"Ciel! quel malheur!" uttered Madame Dusommerard, entering Lady Ashley's room one gloomy day in November. "Has miladi heard the news!"

"What news?" apathetically responded miladi.

"That poor widow of Etienne Baux! She has never been strong since the child was born, and now she is gone. I sent Thérésine down with a little bowl of soup, and now she has brought it back and says the woman died an hour ago. The stupid thing, that Thérésine is! but she is a girl who never did have any head. As if she could not have given the broth to the poor children, instead of lugging it back here."

"Whoever will take care of the children?" exclaimed Lady Ashley, somewhat aroused. "There are several, are there not?"

"Who, indeed! It is a merciful thing, miladi, that there's a God to be a Father to the fatherless. Poor little

creatures! It is not that they will be quite at a fault for means, for milor's liberality has prevented that, but who is to charge themselves with them and bring them up? Perhaps Mademoiselle Baux, the repasseuse, will; she is their only relation that I know of, and she is their father's sister."

"My lady," interrupted Nana, putting her black head inside the room, "nursee say little piccaninny not seem well - if my lady go see?"

There was no need of a second summons. Lady Ashley darted across the passage to the room occupied by her infant. The wet-nurse had it in her arms, its eyes were heavy and its face flushed.

"If it were older, I should say it was about its teeth," cried madame, who had followed.

"Send instantly for the doctor," interrupted Lady Ashley, putting herself into a state of great excitement. "Let him be brought without an instant's loss of time."

Madame went to give the necessary orders. When she returned, Lady Ashley was pacing the room as if she were walking for a wager, the child clasped in her arms. "But miladi is troubling herself more than there's occasion for," remonstrated the landlady.

"More than there's occasion for!" reiterated Lady Ashley. "This child's life is of greater value than ours; better we all died together than he."

"Oh, miladi is pleased to joke," was madame's rejoindor, "A child's life is precious, nobody would say to the contrary, but it cannot be put in comparison with that of a grown-up person—with miladi's own, let us say. A child is but a child."

"I tell you, upon this child's living depends more than you can form any idea of," retorted Lady Ashley, who was too much agitated to weigh her words. "He must live! he shall not die!"

The doctor was heard coming up the stairs, and madame opened the door in readiness. He looked at the child; he saw nothing particularly the matter with it.

"Is it attacked with the fever?" demanded Lady Ashley.

The fever, bah! The fever had left the town a month ago. He had told miladi so himself.

"Doctor," she impressively whispered in the strongest French she could command, and the words trembled on her lips, "the child *must* live. Keep him well, keep him in life, and I will reward you as you have never yet been rewarded."

The doctor looked at Lady Ashley and turned away with a raise of the shoulders. "If the child should be attacked with illness, I will do for him what lies in my skill," he observed, "but for life—that is not in mortal hands, miladi."

The doctor prescribed some medicine and went home again. He was descanting to his wife, "Les droles de caractères qu'ils sont, ces Anglais!" when Zan burst into his room, in his untidy slippers down at heel, without the ceremony of knocking. Monsieur le Medecin must fly up to the hotel upon wings. The infant had gone into a convulsion, and miladi its mother was stark frantic.

Little rest that day had the worried doctor between the "frantic" mother and the sick child. It relapsed from one convulsion into another, the last occurring about twelve o'clock at night. In that it died. It happened—it is wonderful to see and reflect how great emergencies are sure to be provided for!—that a Swiss Protestant minister halted for that evening at the hotel. The landlady suggested that he should baptize the infant: indeed, the whole arrondissement had been alive with the scandal of its having been delayed so long—"these careless heretics!"—and Lady Ashley, when convinced there was no hope of its life,

consented. So poor little Philip Ryle was made a Christian to die.

Excited, unmanageable as Lady Ashley had been that whole day, with the child's death she relapsed into comparative calmness. But she would not be spoken to. The attendants suggested her retiring to rest: she waved them off, and paced restlessly from one room to another, muttering words between her closed teeth and gesticulating with her hands, as if she were debating some question with herself.

Morning came, and with it commenced the preparations for the child's funeral. It was to take place that evening. Lady Ashley indignantly protested against the haste, and the authorities were requested to allow it to be delayed. They refused: they said there were no grounds for granting the request, and nobody had ever asked such a thing before. The Protestant minister had offered to remain to bury it; and Monsieur le Cure, the local priest, with magnanimous generosity, allowed it to be laid just outside his cemetery; not inside, lest it might contaminate the ashes of the departed Roman Catholics. Another funeral also took place the same afternoon—that of the widow of the ill-fated Etienne Baux, the postboy. The whole population of the place turned out to attend them through the rain: a few were attracted by sympathy to that of Madame Etienne, but the masses flocked to the other, curious to witness the ceremonies of the heretics over the burial of their dead.

Late in the evening, Madame Dusommerard was in her kitchen, scolding her maids, for the seven o'clock supper was not ready. It had been a noted day, what with the funeral from the house and the other one, and the girls had seized upon the opportunity for enjoying a gossip; consequently their work suffered, and madame was holding forth in rather shrill tones. She was in the midst of a sentence, specially hurled at Mam'selle Thérésine, when,

upon turning her head, who should she see, standing in the middle of the kitchen, but Lady Ashley, dressed to go out.

Madame's tongue and words dropped to the softness of butter in summer. What could she have the pleasure of doing for miladi? To think that miladi should have condescended to come down there, amongst the casseroles!

"I want a guide," said Lady Ashley—"some one to go out with me. I wish to go and see those poor orphan children. Let one of the servants show me the way," she added.

"But miladi surely will never do such a thing to-night!" cried madame. "Everybody must appreciate miladi's benevolent thoughts, but she must consider her own comfort and health. It is pitch dark, and the rain pouring down still, as it has done all day. Miladi had better wait till morning."

Miladi chose to go then. So Célestine, in obedience to orders, threw on her ample olive-green cloth cloak and attended her.

"Is it far?" inquired Lady Ashley, walking under the large, bright scarlet umbrella, which Célestine held.

"About six or seven minutes' walk," responded the girl. "We follow the gutter—would miladi please to take care of her long petticoats?—then turn to the right, then to the left, and miladi is at it."

They reached the place, Célestine piloting Lady Ashley up the stairs. The sister of Etienne Baux had entered, and taken possession of the room, the furniture, and the children. Four children were asleep in the bed in the recess, two at the top of the bed, two at the foot, French fashion; another slept in the bed in the room, and the infant, now a month old, Marie Baux held in her arms, feeding it with some broth from her own supper. Two gossips were seated near, having dropped in to bear her company.

'It is Miladi Anglaise," was Celestine's introduction to the astonished Demoiselle Baux. "She is come to see the poor little orphans, all through the dark and wet. Madame wanted her to put it off till daylight, but nothing would do but that she must come to-night. Quelle dame charitable! and her own infant only three hours buried!"

Lady Ashley cast a glance, and but a glance, towards the sleeping children, whilst the gossips said "Bon soir," and withdrew in all humility. Her ladyship's attention was riveted on the infant. "Is it healthy?" she inquired. "Is it likely to live? It seems a very large child."

"Alas, yes! poor unfortunate!" replied Mademoiselle Baux. "It would have been a mercy, miladi, had it pleased the Holy Virgin to remove it with its mother, but strong as it is, it's sure to live and grow. It is the strongest and heartiest of all the lot. But just reflect, miladi, what a task it is to fall on my hands!—I, who was beginning to think of getting married myself. I should not have cared so much for the others, although there are five of them; they can shift for themselves, and two or three will soon be able to do something; but it is this infant that's the tie. How I am to go out to my work, the saints only know; and I have my regular places. I can't leave it in bed, to be pitched out by the others; and I can't leave it on the floor, to be trampled on; and I can't dance myself home, three or four times a day, to feed it. Ah! it's a dreadful charge to fall on me, is this child!"

"I feel much compassion for the case," rejoined Lady Ashley, "and have come to see how I can help you. Suppose I were to take this infant and bring him up?"

The Demoiselle Baux could not understand. Miladi's French was somewhat obscure; but had such an offer been made in the most concise language, she would have thought she heard wrongly.

"I have no boy," repeated Lady Ashley: "my own dear little one is just buried in your cemetery. I will take this one, if you will, to supply its place."

Heavens! but Miladi Anglaise could never be serious! Such an offer to descend upon the poor miserable orphan Baux! Mademoiselle was bewildered with its greatness.

"Then you will give him to me?" said Lady Ashley.

"Oh, miladi! can it indeed be real? Mademoiselle Celestine, can it be that Miladi Anglaise is not playing the farce with me?" reiterated Marie Baux, in tears. "Miladi shall be prayed for every day for a year. Night and morning I'll go into the church, my own self, to supplicate the Virgin for her in a prayer. Such goodness is unbelievable."

"Then I *am* to have him?" repeated Lady Ashley, growing impatient.

"Oh, whenever miladi pleases. And we will all fall on our knees in thanksgiving. It is nothing short of a miracle that has fallen on the infant."

The amazed Celestine crossed herself. She had stood, till now, with her mouth open. "Quelle bonté!" she murmured, "l'ange de charite qu'elle est!"

"I will take him now," said Lady Ashley.

"Now! late at night! in the merciless rain!" repeated Marie Baux.

"He will come to no harm. Célestine shall put him under her cloak. Neither cold nor rain can touch him there."

The infant, during the discussion, had fallen asleep. Mademoiselle Baux wrapped a shawl round him and handed him to Célestine. She stooped to kiss his cheek before the girl hid him in the ample folds of her olive cloak. "Miladi will be kind to him?" she whispered, looking with a supplicating expression at Lady Ashley.

"Kind to him!" repeated Lady Ashley. "The child shall be brought up as my own child. I promise it to you in the hearing of Heaven. What more would you have?"

"Oh, miladi is all goodness! we should be infidels to doubt her," answered the Demoiselle Baux. "And for the poor bits of caps and things he has, I will bring them to miladi at the hotel——"

"No!" imperiously interrupted Lady Ashley. "Give them to any child who has need of them: and you can come to-morrow morning and fetch away those he has on."

Lady Ashley and Célestine, the former condescending to carry the ponderous scarlet umbrella, had left the house and plunged into the mud outside it, when Mademoiselle Baux came after them in a flurry.

Miladi had forgotten to ask the child's name. It was Robert.

Considerably astonished was the Hotel, and all in it, when the new importation arrived. The praises of Miladi Anglaise were sounded from one end of it to the other. Such an instance of benevolence had never before been heard of. The nurse spoke up loudest of any, and seized the little child with signs of rapture. She spoke feelingly: ever since the other infant's death she had been crying her eyes out at the prospect of losing so good a place, and now she should retain it.

But another surprise was to fall upon the hotel: perhaps not so agreeable a one. Lady Ashley, that same night, summoned the landlady, and gave orders for their departure the following day. The place was now too melancholy for her to remain in, she said; madame might readily believe that—and her husband, Sir Henry, spoke anxiously in his letters for her return. He was already at their own home, Ashley.

Madame replied that she knew well St. Ouest must be

haste, and though sorry to lose miladi, she could not of course urge her remaining. But she hoped they might see miladi again some time: perhaps next summer.

Lady Ashley could not say. It was very far from England. Madame might present the bill in the morning, and see to the post-horses. She should start in the middle of the day.

Nana, the West Indian servant, stood waiting to undress her lady that night, and it seemed she was to wait in vain. Certainly, Lady Ashley could bear an incredible amount of fatigue. The whole of the previous night she had paced the rooms in excitement, and this one, when it might be thought she would have been glad of rest and sleep, she was pacing them still. Nana was tired, if her mistress was not: it was close upon midnight: and as the monotonous footsteps of Lady Ashley sounded on her ear from the adjacent rooms sleep stole over her.

How long she slept she did not know, but her arm was suddenly and rudely shaken. She started up to see her mistress bending over her.

"Nana!" uttered Lady Ashley, with that resolute look on her dark face, and those pale compressed lips which the good, faithful woman disliked to see—"Nana, do you want to be flogged?"

"Ha! mercy, my lady! Nana only shut her eyes for she think one little minute, and sleep come, come, without her knowing it."

"Tush! sleep away if you like, when you are not wanted; what do I care? It is many years since you were flogged——"

"Oh, many, many," interrupted the woman, beginning to tremble. "My lady, what poor Nana do?"

"Will you hear me, woman? I speak not of those old, light floggings in the West Indies and in Madras, but I ask

if you would like to be flogged till you drop—till you die?"

What with the sudden waking, and the words, the woman trembled so violently that her teeth began to chatter; but, from the force of habit, she gave a straightforward answer.

"No, it would be dreadful so to be punished now. Why does my lady threaten it?"

"I threaten it only in case of your disobedience. You have seen that child I brought here to-night: it is to be mine. Do you understand? When we get home to England, it is to be the little child I lost. None know that he is dead: I have not written: they never will know it. And if ever you breathe a word of the truth—a word that this is not the child Sir Henry left here—you shall be scourged as I tell you."

The dark West Indian blood rushed into Lady Ashley's excited face, and her clenched hands shook as she held them threateningly at Nana. The latter spoke:

"My lady knows that Nana always obey her, always, always. Nana her own slave and her mother's slave before her. If my lady say Nana jump into that fire, Nana do it. My lady only tell Nana what to say, and Nana say it."

"It is well," returned Lady Ashley. "Remember."

"But nursee not a slave," suddenly exclaimed the woman, as an idea appeared to strike her. "how my lady make nursee say it was the same child?"

"That is my business," retorted Lady Ashley. "Yours is to mind what I have commanded you."

It was one o'clock the next day, about fourteen weeks from the period of her arrival at St. Ouest, that Lady Ashley quitted the hotel. Her black maid, the infant Robert Baux, and the nurse, who was a native of St. Ouest, accompanying her. She had been a profitable guest, one the hotel did not often meet with, and Monsieur Auguste Dusommerard,

madame his wife, the three maids, and Zan all stood in the street to salute her, on the right and left of the porte cochere. Half the town had likewise congregated there to watch the departure, the Demoiselle Baux and the orphan children forming part of them, while murmurings of prayer for Miladi Anglaise the angel caught the ear. Lady Ashley gave a cold bow on either side, and the carriage moved up the hill. As it toiled past the cemetery the lady cast a passionate, regretful glance towards a spot of earth near it, and when it was no longer visible she flung herself back in her seat, and her eyes fell upon the infant opposite to her. If we may believe all tales, that little child is not the only one who has been palmed off for a real heir.